BURNED BRIDGES

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Mrs. Bessie E. Kagay-
from
St Louis Mo
3710 12/10/17

BURNED BRIDGES

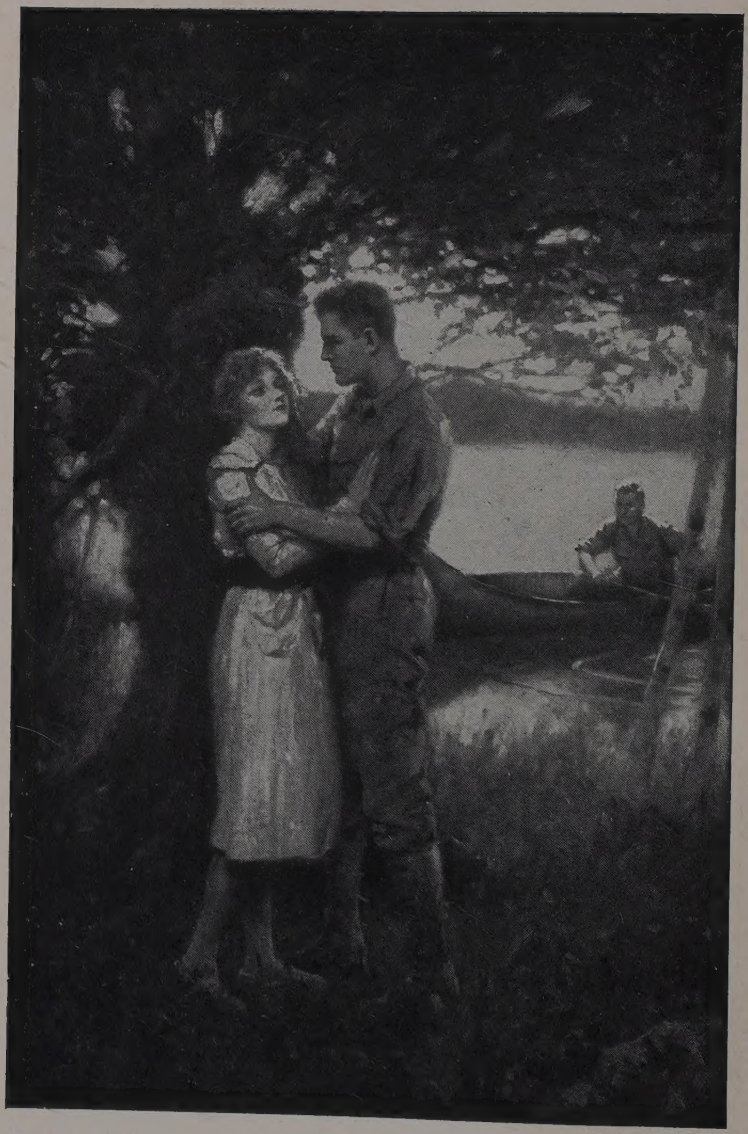
Novels by

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

North of Fifty-Three

Big Timber

Burned Bridges



He felt with an odd exaltation the quick hammer of her heart against his breast. FRONTISPIECE. *See page 95.*

BURNED BRIDGES

BY

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

RALPH P. COLEMAN

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1919

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Published, August, 1919

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CHAPTER I

THE FIRST PROBLEM

Lone Moose snaked its way through levels of woodland and open stretches of meadow, looping sinuously as a sluggish python — a python that rested its mouth upon the shore of Lake Athabasca while its tail was lost in a great area of spruce forest and poplar groves, of reedy sloughs and hushed lakes far northward.

The waterways of the North are its highways. There are no others. No wheeled vehicles traverse that silent region which lies just over the fringe of the prairies and the great Canadian wheat belt. The canoe is lord of those watery roads; when a man would diverge therefrom he must carry his goods upon his back. There are paths, to be sure, very faint in places, padded down by the feet of generations of Athabascan tribesmen long before the Ancient and Honorable Company of Adventurers laid the foundation of the first post at Hudson's Bay, long before the *Half Moon's* prow first cleft those desolate waters. They have been trodden, these dim trails, by Scotch and French and English since that historic event, and by a numerous progeny in whose veins the blood of all three races mingles with that of the native tribes. But these paths lead only from

stream to stream and from lake to lake. No man familiar with the North seeks along those faint trails for camp or fur posts or villages. Wherever in that region red men or white set up a permanent abode it must of necessity be on the bank of a stream or the shore of a lake, from whence by canoe and paddle access is gained to the network of water routes that radiate over the fur country.

Lone Moose Creek was, so to speak, a trunk line. The ninety miles of its main channel, its many diverging branches, tapped a region where mink and marten and beaver, fox and wolf and lesser furs were still fairly plentiful. Along Lone Moose a dozen Cree and half-breed families disappeared into the back country during the hazy softness of Indian summer and came gliding down in the spring with their winter's catch, a birch-bark flotilla laden indiscriminately with mongrel dogs and chattering women and children and baled furs and impassive-faced men, bound for Port Pachugan to the annual barter.

Up Lone Moose some twenty-odd miles from the lake the social instinct had drawn a few families, pure-blooded Cree, and Scotch and French half-breeds, to settle in a permanent location. There was a crescent-shaped area of grassy turf fronting upon the eastern bank of Lone Moose, totaling perhaps twenty acres. Its outer edge was ringed with a dense growth of spruce timber. In the fringe of these dusky woods, at various intervals of distance, could be seen the outline of each cabin. They were much of a sort — two or three rooms, log-walled, brush laid upon poles,

and sod on top of that for a roof, with fireplaces built partly of mud, partly of rough stones. Folk in such circumstances waste no labor in ornamentation. Each family's abiding place was purely utilitarian. They cultivated no land, and the meadow during the brief season supplied them with a profusion of delicate flowers a southern garden could scarcely excel. Aside from a few trees felled about each home site, their common effort had cleared away the willows and birch which bordered the creek bank, so that an open landing was afforded the canoes.

There was but one exception to the monotonous similitude of these several habitations. A few paces back from the stream and standing boldly in the open rose a log house double the size of any other there. It contained at least four rooms. Its windows were of ample size, the doors neatly carpentered. A wide porch ran on three sides. It bore about itself an air of homely comfort, heightened by muslin at the windows, a fringe of poppies and forget-me-nots blooming in an orderly row before it, and a sturdy vine laden with morning-glories twining up each supporting column of the porch roof.

Between the house and the woods an acre square was enclosed by a tall picket fence. Within the fence, which was designed as a barricade against foraging deer, there grew a variety of vegetables. The produce of that garden had grown famous far beyond Lone Moose village. But the spirit and customs and traditions of the gardener's neighbors were all against any attempt to duplicate it. They were hunters and trap-

pers and fishermen. The woods and waters supplied their every need.

Upon a blistering day in July, a little past noon, a man stepped out on the porch, and drawing into the shadiest part a great, rude homemade chair upholstered with moosehide, sat down. He had a green-bound book in his hand. While he stuffed a clay pipe full of tobacco he laid the volume across his knees. Every movement was as deliberate as the flow of the deep stream near by. When he had stoked up his pipe he leaned back and opened the book. The smoke from his pipe kept off what few mosquitoes were abroad in the scorching heat of midday.

A casual glance would at once have differentiated him from a native, held him guiltless of any trace of native blood. His age might have been anywhere between forty and fifty. His hair, now plentifully shot with gray, had been a light, wavy brown. His eyes were a clear gray, and his features were the antithesis of his high-cheekboned neighbors. Only the weather-beaten hue of his skin, and the scores of fine seams radiating from his eyes told of many seasons squinting against hot sunlight and harsh winds.

Whatever his vocation and manner of living may have been he was now deeply absorbed in the volume he held. A small child appeared on the porch, a youngster of three or thereabouts, with swarthy skin, very dark eyes, and inky-black hair. He went on all fours across Sam Carr's extended feet several times. Carr remained oblivious, or at least undisturbed, until the child stood up, laid hold of his knee and shook it with

playful persistence. Then Carr looked over his book, spoke to the boy casually, shaking his head as he did so. The boy persisted after the juvenile habit. Carr raised his voice. An Indian woman, not yet of middle age but already inclining to the stoutness which overtakes women of her race early in life, appeared in the doorway. She spoke sharply to the boy in the deep, throaty language of her people. The boy, with a last impish grin, gave the man's leg a final shake and scuttled indoors. Carr impassively resumed his reading.

An hour or so later he lifted his eyes from the printed page at a distant boom of thunder. The advanced edge of a black cloud-bank rolling swiftly up from the east was already dimming the brassy glare of the sun. He watched the swift oncoming of the storm. With astonishing rapidity the dark mass resolved itself into a gray, obscuring streak of rain riven by vivid flashes of lightning. Carr laid down his book and refilled his pipe while he gazed on this common phenomenon of the dog-days. It swept up and passed over the village of Lone Moose as a sprinkling wagon passes over a city street. The downpour was accompanied by crashing detonations that sent the village dogs howling to cover. With the same uncanny swiftness of gathering so it passed, leaving behind a pleasant coolness in the air, clean smells of the washed earth arising. The sun blazed out again. A million rain-pearls hung glistening on the blades of grass in the meadow before Sam Carr's house.

With the passing of the thunder shower, before Carr left off his contemplation of the freshened beauty of

meadow and woods, a man and a woman emerged from the spruce forest on the farther side of the meadow.

They walked a little way in the open, stopped for a minute, facing each other. Their conversation ended with a sudden quick gesture by the man. Turning, they came on again toward Carr's house. Sam Carr's clear gray eyes lit up. The ghost of a smile hovered about his bearded lips. He watched them approach with that same quizzical expression, a mixture, if one gauged his look aright, of pleasure and pride and expectation.

They were young as years go, the pair that walked slowly up to the cabin. The man was certainly still in his twenties, of medium height, compactly muscular, a good-looking specimen of pure Anglo-Saxon manhood. The girl was a flower in perfect bloom, fresh-colored, slender and pliant as a willow, with all of the willow's grace in every movement. For all the twenty-odd years between them, and the gulf of sex differentiation, there was in her glance and bearing much of the middle-aged man who sat on the porch with a book across his knees and a clay pipe in his mouth. It did not lie in facial resemblance. It was more subtle than likeness of feature. Perhaps it was because of their eyes, alike deep gray, wide and expressive, lifted always to meet another's in level unembarrassed frankness.

They halted at the edge of the porch. The girl sat down. The young man nodded to Carr. Though they had but lately been fair in the path of the thunderstorm they had escaped a wetting. The girl's eyes followed her father's glance, seemed to read his thought.

"We happened to find a spruce thick enough to shed the rain," she smiled. "Or I suppose we'd have been soaked properly."

The young fellow tarried only till she was seated. He had no more than greeted Carr before he lifted his old felt hat to her.

"I'll be paddling back while the coolness lasts," said he. "Good-by."

"Good-by, Tommy," the girl answered.

"So long," Carr followed suit. "Don't give us the go-by too long."

"Oh, no danger."

He walked to the creek bank, stepped into a red canoe that lay nose on to the landing, and backed it free with his paddle. Ten strokes of the blade drove him out of sight around the first brushy bend upstream.

The girl looked thoughtfully after him. Her face was flushed, and her eyes glowed with some queer repressed feeling. Carr sat gazing silently at her while she continued to look after the vanished canoe whose passing left tiny swirls on the dark, sluggish current of Lone Moose. Presently Carr gave the faintest shrug of his lean shoulders and resumed the reading of his book.

When he looked up from the page again after a considerable interval the girl's eyes were fixed intently upon his face, with a queer questioning expression in them, a mute appeal. He closed his book with a forefinger inserted to mark the place, and leaned forward a trifle.

"What is it, Sophie?" he asked gently. "Eh?"

The girl, like her father, and for that matter the

majority of those who dwelt in that region, wore moccasins. She sat now, rubbing the damp, bead-decorated toe of one on top of the other, her hands resting idle in the lap of her cotton dress. She seemed scarcely to hear, but Carr waited patiently. She continued to look at him with that peculiar, puzzled quality in her eyes.

"Tommy Ashe wants me to marry him," she said at last.

The faint flush on her smooth cheeks deepened. The glow in her eyes gave way altogether to that vaguely troubled expression.

Carr stroked his short beard reflectively.

"Well," he said at length, "seeing that human nature's what it is, I can't say I'm surprised any more than I would be surprised at the trees leafing out in spring. And, as it happens, Tommy observed the conventions of his class in this matter. He asked me about it a few days ago. I referred him to you. Are you going to?"

"I don't know, Dad," she murmured.

"Do you want to?" he pursued the inquiry in a detached, impersonal tone.

"I don't know," she repeated soberly. "I like Tommy a lot. When I'm with him I feel sure I'd be perfectly happy to be always with him. When I'm away from him, I'm not so sure."

"In other words," Carr observed slowly, "your reason and your emotions are not in harmony on that subject. Eh? So far as Tommy Ashe goes, your mind and your body pull you two different ways."

She looked at him a little more keenly.

"Perhaps," she said. "I know what you mean. But I don't clearly see why it should be so. Either I love Tommy Ashe, or I don't, and I should know which, shouldn't I? The first and most violent manifestation of love is mostly physical, isn't it? I've always understood that. You've pointed it out. I do like Tommy. Why should my mind act as a brake on my feelings?"

"Because you happen to be made the way you are," Carr returned thoughtfully. "As I've told you a good many times, you've grown up a good deal different from the common run of girls. We've been isolated. Lacking the time-occupying distractions and pleasures of youth in a more liberal environment, Sophie, you've been thrown back on yourself and me and books, and as a result you've cultivated a natural tendency to *think*. Most young women don't. They're seldom taught any rational process of arriving at conclusions. You have developed that faculty. It has been my pride and pleasure to cultivate in you what I believed to be a decided mentality. I've tried to show you how to get down to fundamentals, to work out a philosophy of life that's really workable. Knowledge is worth having for its own sake. Once you find yourself in contact with the world — and for you that time is bound to come — you'll apply all the knowledge you've absorbed to problems as they arise. If there's a rational solution to any situation that faces you, you'll make an effort to find that solution. You'll do it almost instinctively. You can't help it. Your brain is too alert ever to let you act blindly. At the present your

lack of experience probably handicaps you a little. In human relations you have nothing much but theory, got from the books you've digested and the way we've always discussed every possible angle of life. Take Tommy Ashe. He's practically the first young, attractive white man you've ever met, the very first possibility as a lover. Tommy's a nice boy, a pleasant, sunny-natured young fellow. Personally he's just the sort of fellow that would sweep a simple country girl clean off her feet. With you, your mind, as you just put it, acts as a brake on your feelings. Can't you guess why?"

"No," she said quietly. "I can't. I don't understand myself and my shifts of feeling. It makes me miserable."

"Look here, Sophie girl," Carr reached over and taking her by the hand drew her up on the low arm of his chair, "you're asking yourself a more or less important question directly, and you're asking it of me indirectly. Maybe I can help you. At least I can tell how I see it. You have all your life before you. You want to be happy. That's a universal human attribute. Sometime or other you're going to mate with a man. That too is a universal experience. Ordinary mating is based on sex instinct. Love is mostly an emotional disturbance generated by natural causes for profoundly natural and important ends. But marriage and the intimate associations of married life require something more substantial than a mere flare-up of animal instinct. Lots of men and women aren't capable of anything else, and consequently they make

the best of what's in them. But there are natures far more complex. You, Sophie, are one of those complex natures. With you, a union based on sex alone wouldn't survive six months. Now, in this particular case, leaving out the fact that you can't compare Tommy Ashe with any other man, because you don't know any other man, can you conceive yourself living in a tolerable state of contentment with Tommy if, say, you didn't feel any more passion for him than you feel for, say, old Standing Wolf over there?"

"But that's absurd," the girl declared. "Because I have got that feeling for Tommy Ashe, and therefore I can't imagine myself in any other state. I can't look at it the cold-blooded way you do, Daddy dear."

"I'm stating a hypothetical case," Carr went on patiently. "You do now. We'll take that for granted. Would you still have anything fundamental in common with Tommy with that part left out? Suppose you got so you didn't care whether he kissed you or not? Suppose it were no longer a physical pleasure just to be near him. Would you enjoy his daily and hourly presence then, in the most intimate relation a man and a woman can hold to each other?"

"Why, I wouldn't live with him at all," the girl said positively. "I simply couldn't. I know."

"You might have to," Carr answered gently. "You have never yet run foul of circumstances over which you have no more power than man has over the run of the tides. But we'll let that pass. I'm trying to help you, Sophie, not to discourage you. There are some situations in which, and some natures to whom, half a

loaf is worse than no bread. Do you feel, have you ever for an hour felt that you simply couldn't face an existence in which Tommy Ashe had no part? "

Sophie put her arm around his neck, and her fingers played a tattoo on his shoulder.

"No," she said at last. "I can't honestly say that I've ever been overwhelmed with a feeling like that."

"Well, there you are," Carr observed dryly. "Between the propositions I think you've answered your own question."

The girl's breast heaved a little and her breath went out in a fluttering sigh.

"Yes," she said gravely. "I suppose that is so."

They sat silent for an interval. Then something wet and warm dropped on Carr's hand. He looked up quickly.

"Does it hurt? " he said softly. "I'm sorry."

"So am I," she whispered. "But chiefly, I think, I am sorry for Tommy. *He'd* be perfectly happy with me."

"Yes, I suppose so," Carr replied. "But you wouldn't be happy with him, only for a brief time, Sophie. Tommy's a good boy, but it will take a good deal of a man to fill your life. You'd outgrow Tommy. And you'd hurt him worse in the end."

She ran her soft hand over Carr's grizzled hair with a caressing touch. Then she got up and walked away into the house. Carr turned his gaze again to the meadow and the green woods beyond. For ten minutes he sat, his posture one of peculiar tensity, his eyes on the distance unseeingly — or as if he saw something

vague and far-off that troubled him. Then he gave his shoulders a quick impatient twitch, and taking up his book began once more to read.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

At almost the same hour in which Sam Carr and his daughter held that intimate conversation on the porch of their home a twenty-foot Peterborough freight canoe was sliding down the left-hand bank of the Athabasca like some gray river-beast seeking the shade of the birch and willow growth that overhung the shore. The current beneath and the thrust of the blades sent it swiftly along the last mile of the river and shot the gray canoe suddenly beyond the sharp nose of a jutting point fairly into the bosom of a great, still body of water that spread away northeastward in a widening stretch, its farthest boundary a watery junction with the horizon.

There were three men in the canoe. One squatted forward, another rested his body on his heels in the after end. These two were swarthy, stockily built men, scantily clad, moccasins on their feet, and worn felt hats crowning lank, black hair long innocent of a barber's touch.

The third man sat amidships in a little space left among goods that were piled to the top of the deep-sided craft. He was no more like his companions than the North that surrounded them with its silent waterways and hushed forests is like the tropical jungle.

He was a fairly big man, taller, wider-bodied than the other two. His hair was a reddish-brown, his eyes as blue as the arched dome from which the hot sun shed its glare.

He had on a straight-brimmed straw hat which in the various shifts of the long water route and many camps had suffered disaster, so that a part of the brim drooped forlornly over his left ear. This headgear had preserved upon his brow the pallid fairness of his skin. From the eyebrows down his face was in the last stages of sunburn, reddened, minute shreds of skin flaking away much as a snake's skin sheds in August. Otherwise he was dressed, like a countless multitude of other men who walk the streets of every city in North America, in a conventional sack suit, and shoes that still bore traces of blacking. The paddlers were stripped to thin cotton shirts and worn overalls. The only concession their passenger had made to the heat was the removal of his laundered collar. Apparently his dignity did not permit him to lay aside his coat and vest. As they cleared the point a faint breeze wavered off the open water. He lifted his hat and let it play about his moist hair.

"This is Lake Athabasca?" he asked.

"Oui, M'sieu Thompson," Mike Breyette answered from the bow, without turning his head. "Dees de lak."

"How much longer will it take us to reach Fort Pachugan?" Thompson made further inquiry.

"Bout two-three hour, maybeso," Breyette responded.

He said something further, a few quick sentences in the French patois of the northern half-breeds, at which both he and his fellow-voyageur in the stern laughed. Their gayety stirred no response from the midship passenger. If anything, he frowned. He was a serious-minded young man, and he did not understand French. He had a faint suspicion that his convoy did not take him as seriously as he wished. Whether their talk was badinage or profanity or purely casual, he could not say. In the first stages of their journey together, on the upper reaches of the river, Mike Breyette and Donald MacDonald had, after the normal habit of their kind, greeted the several contingencies and minor mishaps such a journey involved with plaintive oaths in broken English. Mr. Wesley Thompson, projected into an unfamiliar environment and among a — to him — strange manner of men, took up his evangelistic cudgel and administered shocked reproof. It was, in a way, practice for the tasks the Methodist Board of Home Missions had appointed him to perform. But if he failed to convict these two of sin, he convinced them of discourtesy. Even a rude voyageur has his code of manners. Thereafter they invariably swore in French.

They bore on in a northerly direction, keeping not too far from the lake shore, lest the combination of a sudden squall and a heavy-loaded canoe should bring disaster. When Mike Breyette's "two-tree" hour was run Mr. Thompson stepped from the canoe to the sloping, sun-blistered beach before Fort Pachugan, and if he did not openly offer thanks to his Maker that he

stood once more upon solid ground he at least experienced profound relief.

For many days he had occupied that midship position with ill-concealed misgivings. The largest bodies of water he had been on intimate terms with heretofore had been contained within the dimensions of a bathtub. He could not swim. No matter that his faith in an all-wise Providence was strong he could not forbear inward tremors at the certain knowledge that only a scant quarter-inch of frail wood and canvas stood between him and a watery grave. He regarded a canoe with distrust. Nor could he understand the careless confidence with which his guides embarked in so captious a craft upon the swirling bosom of that wide, swift stream they had followed from Athabasca Landing down to the lake of the same name. To Thompson — if he had been capable of analyzing his sensations and transmuting them into words — the river seemed inexplicably sinister, a turbid monster writhing over polished boulders, fuming here and there over rapids, snarling a constant menace under the canoe's prow.

It did not comfort him to know that he was in the hands of two capable rivermen, tried and proven in bad water, proud of their skill with the paddle. Could he have done so the reverend young man would gladly have walked after the first day in their company. But since that was out of the question, he took his seat in the canoe each morning and faced each stretch of troubled water with an inward prayer.

The last stretch and this last day had tried his soul to its utmost. Pachugan lay near the end of the water

route. What few miles he had to travel beyond the post would lie along the lake shore, and the lake reassured him with its smiling calm. Having never seen it harried by fierce winds, pounding the beaches with curling waves, he could not visualize it as other than it was now, glassy smooth, languid, inviting. Over the last twenty miles of the river his guides had strained a point now and then, just to see their passenger gasp. They would never have another chance and it was rare sport, just as it is rare sport for spirited youths to snowball a passer-by who does not take kindly to their pastime.

In addition to these nerve-disturbing factors Thompson suffered from the heat. A perverted dignity, nurtured in a hard-shell, middle-class environment, prevented him from stripping to his undershirt. The sun's rays, diffusing abnormal heat through the atmosphere, reflected piercingly upward from the water, had played havoc with him. His first act upon landing was to seat himself upon a flat-topped boulder and dab tenderly at his smarting face while his men hauled up the canoe. That in itself was a measure of his inefficiency, as inefficiency is measured in the North. The Chief Factor of a district large enough to embrace a European kingdom, traveling in state from post to post, would not have been above lending a hand to haul the canoe clear. Thompson had come to this *terra incognita* to preach and pray, to save men's souls. So far it had not occurred to him that aught else might be required of a man before he could command a respectful hearing.

Back from the beach, in a clearing hacked out of the woods, stood a score or more of low cabins flanking a building more ambitious in scope and structure. More than a century had passed since the first foundation logs were laid in the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, to the Company's glory and profit. It had been a fort then, in all that the name implies throughout the fur country. It had boasted a stockade, a brass cannon which commanded the great gates that swung open to friendly strangers and were closed sharply to potential foes. But the last remnant of Pachugan's glory had gone glimmering down the corridors of time. The Company was still as strong, stronger even in power more sure and subtle than ever lay in armed retainers and absolute monopoly. But Fort Pachugan had become a mere collecting station for the lesser furs, a distributing center for trade goods to native trappers. There were no more hostile tribes. The Company no longer dealt out the high justice, the middle, and the low. The stockade and the brass cannon were traditions. Pachugan sprawled on the bank of the lake, open to all comers, a dimming landmark of the old days.

What folk were out of doors bent their eyes upon the canoe. The factor himself rose from his seat on the porch and came down to have speech with them. Thompson, recognizing authority, made known his name and his mission. The burly Scot shook hands with him. They walked away together, up to the factor's house. On the threshold the Reverend Wesley paused for a backward look, drew the crumpled linen of his handkerchief across his moist brow, and then disappeared

within. Mike Breyette and Donald MacDonald looked at each other expressively. Their swarthy faces slowly expanded in a broad grin.

In the North, what with the crisp autumn, the long winter, and that bleak, uncertain period which is neither winter nor spring, summer — as we know it in softer lands — has but a brief span to endure. But Nature there as elsewhere works out a balance, adheres to a certain law of proportion. What Northern summers lack in length is compensated by intensity. When the spring floods have passed and the warm rains follow through lengthening days of sun, grass and flowers arise with magic swiftness from a wonderfully fertile soil. Trees bud and leaf; berries form hard on the blossoming. Overnight, as it were, the woods and meadows, the river flats and the higher rolling country, become transformed. And when August passes in a welter of flies and heat and thunderstorms, the North is ready once more for the frosty segment of its seasonal round. July and August are hot months in the high latitudes. For six weeks or thereabouts the bottomlands of the Peace and the Athabasca can hold their own with the steaming tropics. After that — well, this has to do in part with "after that." For it was in late July when Wesley Thompson touched at Fort Pachugan, a Bible in his pocket, a few hundred pounds of supplies in Mike Breyette's canoe, certain aspirations of spiritual labor in his head, and little other equipment to guide and succor him in that huge, scantily peopled territory which his superiors had chosen as the field for his labors.

When Breyette and MacDonald had so bestowed the canoe that the diligently foraging dogs of the post could not take toll of their supplies they also hied them up to the cluster of log cabins ranging about the Company store and factor's quarters. They were on tolerably familiar ground. First they made for the cabin of Dougal MacPhee, an ancient servitor of the Company and a distant relative of Breyette's, for whom they had a gift of tobacco. Old Dougal welcomed them laconically, without stirring from his seat in the shade. He sucked at an old clay pipe. His half-breed woman, as wrinkled and time worn as himself, squatted on the earth sewing moccasins. Old Dougal turned his thumb toward a bench and bade them be seated.

"It's a bit war-rm," MacDonald opined, by way of opening the conversation.

"What else wad it be this time o' year?" Dougal rumbled. "Tell us somethin' we dinna ken. Wha's yon cam' wi' ye?"

"Man, but the heat makes ye crabbed," MacDonald returned with naïve candor. "Yon's a meenister."

"Bagosh, yes," Breyette chuckled. "Dat ees de man of God w'at you see. He's com' for save soul hon' de Eenjun hon' Lone Moose. Bagosh, we're have som' fon weet heem dees treep."

"He's a loon," MacDonald paused with a forefinger in the bowl of his pipe. "He doesna know a moccasin from a snowshoe, scarce. I'd like tae be aboot when 'tis forty below — an' gettin' colder. I'm thinkin' he'd relish a taste o' hell-fire then, for a change — eh, Mike?"

The two of them went off into a fit of silent laughter, for the abysmal ignorance of Wesley Thompson concerning practical things, his awkward length of body, his student's pallor that the Athabasca sun had played such havoc with, his blue eyes that looked so often with trepidation or amazement on the commonplaces of their world, his general incapacity and blind belief that an all-wise Providence would personally intervene to make things go right when they went wrong, had not struck these two hardy children of the solitudes as other than a side-splitting joke.

"He rises i' the mornin'," MacDonald continued, "win' a word frae the Book aboot the Lord providin', an' he'd starve if nabody was by t' cook his meal. He canna build a fire wi'oot scorchin' his fingers. He lays hold o' a paddle like a three months' babby. He bids ye pit yer trust i' the Lord, an' himself rises up wi' a start every time a wolf raises the long howl at nicht. I didna believe there was ever sae helpless a creature. An' for a' that he's the laddie that's here tae show the heathen — thae puir, sinfu' heathen, mind ye — how tae find grace. No that he's any doot aboot bein' equal tae the job. For a' that he's nigh helpless i' the woods he was forever ying-yangin' at me an' Mike for what he ca's sinfu' pride in oor ain' persons. I've a notion that if yon had a bit o' that same sinfu' pride he'd be the better able tae make his way."

Old MacPhee took the blackened clay pipe from his mouth and puffed a blue spiral into the dead, sultry air. A sour expression gathered about his withered lips.

"Dinna gibe at yon puir mortal," he rebuked. "Ye canna keep fools frae wanderin'. I've seen manny's the man like him. It's likely that once he's had a fair taste o' the North he'll be less a saint an' more a man."

The afternoon was far spent when they landed. Breyette and MacDonald made themselves comfortable with their backs against the wall. Supper came and was eaten. Evening closed in. The bold, scorching stare of the sun faded. Little cooling breezes fluttered along the lake shore, banishing the last trace of that brassy heat. Men who had lounged indoors, or against shaded walls roamed about, and half-breed women chattered in voluble gutturals back and forth between the cabins.

CHAPTER III

THE DESERTED CABIN

In the factor's comfortable quarters Mr. Thompson sat down to the first meal he had thoroughly relished in two weeks. A corner of the verandah was screened off with wire netting. Outside that barrier mosquitoes and sandflies buzzed and swarmed in futile activity. Within stood an easy chair or two and a small table which was presently spread with a linen cloth, set with porcelain dishes, and garnished with silverware. All the way down the Athabasca Thompson had found every meal beset with exasperating difficulties, fruitful of things that offended both his stomach and his sense of fitness. He had not been able to accommodate himself to the necessity of juggling a tin plate beside a campfire, of eating with one hand and fending off flies with the other. Also he objected to grains of sand and particles of ash and charred wood being incorporated with bread and meat. Neither Breyette nor MacDonald seemed to mind. But Thompson had never learned to adapt himself to conditions that were unavoidable. Pitchforked into a comparatively primitive mode of existence and transportation his first reaction to it took the form of offended resentment. There were times when he forgot why he was there, enduring these things. After such a lapse he prayed for guidance and a patient heart.

These creature comforts now at hand were in a measure what he had been accustomed to, what he had, with no thought on the matter, taken as the accepted and usual order of things, save that his needs had been administered by two prim and elderly spinster aunts instead of a black-browed Scotchman and a half-breed servant girl.

Thompson sat back after his supper, fanning himself with an ancient newspaper, for the day's heat still lingered. Across the table on which he rested an elbow MacLeod, bearded, aggressive, capable, regarded his guest with half-contemptuous pity under cover of the gathering dusk. MacLeod smoked a pipe. Thompson chewed the cud of reflection.

"And so," the factor began suddenly, "ye are a missionary to the Lone Moose Crees. It will be a thankless task; a tougher one nor I'd care to tackle. I ha' seen the job undertaken before by folk who — beggin' your pardon — ha' little conception of the country, the people in it, or the needs of either. Ye'll find the Cree has more concern for meat an' clothes, for traps an' powder, than he has for his soul. Ye'll understand this better when ye ha' more experience in the North. Indeed, it's no impossible ye might come to the same way of thinkin' in time."

The dusk hid the shocked expression that gathered on Thompson's face.

"'What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world if he knoweth not God?'" he quoted gravely. "The priests of the Catholic church have long carried on missionary work among these tribes. We of the Protes-

tant faith would be lacking if we did not try to extend our field, if we made no effort to bear light into the dark places. Man's spiritual need is always greater than any material need can ever be. I hardly expect to accomplish a great deal at first. But the work will grow."

"I see, I see," MacLeod chuckled dryly. "It's partly a matter of the Methodist Church tryin' to compete with the fathers, eh? Well, I am no what ye'd call devout. I ha' had much experience wi' these red folk, an' them that's both red an' white. An' I dinna agree with ye aboot their speeritual needs. I think ye sky-pilots would do better to leave them to their ain gods, such as they are. Man, do ye know that it's better than a century since the fathers began their missionary labors? A hundred years of teachin' an' preachin'. The sum of it a' is next to nothin' — an' naebody knows that better than the same fathers. They're wise, keen-sighted men, too. What good they do they do in a material way. If men like ye came here wi' any certitude of lightenin' the struggle for existence — but ye canna do that; or at least ye dinna do that. Ye'll find that neither red men nor white ha' time or inclination to praise the Lord an' his grace an' bounty when their life's one long struggle wi' hardships an' adversity. The God ye offer them disna mitigate these things. Forbye that, the Indian disna want to be Christianized. When ye come to a determination of abstract qualities, his pagan beliefs are as good for him as the God of the Bible. What right ha' we to cram oor speeritual dogmas doon his gullet?"

MacLeod applied himself to relighting his pipe. Thompson gathered himself together. He was momentarily stricken with speechless amazement. He knew there were such things as critical unbelievers, but he had never encountered one in the flesh. His life had been too excellently supervised and directed in youth by the spinster aunts. Nor does materialistic philosophy flourish in a theological seminary. Young men in training for the ministry are taught to strangle doubt whenever it rears its horrid head, to see only with the single eye of faith.

Neither the bitterness of experience nor a natural gentleness of spirit had ever permitted Thompson to know the beauty and wisdom of tolerance. Whosoever disputed his creed and his consecrated purpose must be in error. The evangelical spirit glowed within him when he faced the factor across the little table. Figuratively speaking he cleared for action. His host, being a hard-headed son of a disputatious race, met him more than half-way. As a result midnight found them still wordily engaged, one maintaining with emotional fervor that man's spiritual welfare was the end and aim of human existence; the other as outspoken — if more calmly and critically so — in his assertion that a tooth-and-toenail struggle for existence left no room in any rational man's life for the manner of religion set forth in general by churches and churchmen. The edge of acrimony crept into the argument.

"The Lord said, 'Leave all thou hast and follow me,'" Thompson declared. "My dear sir, you cannot dispute —"

"Ay, but yon word was said eighteen hundred years past," MacLeod interrupted. "Since which day there's been a fair rate o' progress in man's knowledge of himself an' his needs. The Biblical meeracles in the way o' provender dinna happen nowadays — although some ither modern commonplaces would partake o' the meeraculous if we didna have a rational knowledge of their process. Men are no fed wi' loaves and fishes until they themselves ha' first gotten the loaves an' the fish. At least, it disna so happen i' the Pachugan deestreect. It's much the same the world over, but up here especially ye'll find that the problem o' subsistence is first an' foremost, an' excludes a' else till it's solved."

With this MacLeod, weary of an unprofitable controversy, arose, took up a candle and showed his scandalized guest the way to bed.

Thompson was full of a willingness to revive the argument when he was roused for breakfast at sunrise. But MacLeod had said his say. He abhorred vain repetition. Since it takes two to keep an argument going, Thompson's beginning was but the beginning of a monologue which presently died weakly of inattention. When he gave over trying to inject a theological motif into the conversation, he found MacLeod responsive enough. The factor touched upon native customs, upon the fur trade, upon the vast and unexploited resources of the North, all of which was more or less hazy to Thompson.

His men had intimated an early start. Their journey down the Athabasca had impressed Thompson with the wisdom of that. Only so could they escape the

brazen heat of the sun, and still accomplish a fair day's travel. So he rose immediately from the breakfast table, when he saw Breyette and MacDonald standing by the canoe waiting for him. MacLeod halted him on the verandah steps to give a brusque last word of counsel.

"Look ye, Mr. Thompson," he said. "An honest bit of advice will do ye no harm. Ye're startin' out wi' a brave vision o' doin' a great good; of lettin' a flood o' light into dark places. Speakin' out my ain first-hand experience ye'll be fairly disappointed, because ye'll accomplish nought that's in yer mind. Ye'll have no trouble wi' the Crees. If ye remain among them long enough to mak' them understand yer talk an' objects they'll listen or not as they feel inclined. They're a simple, law-abidin' folk. But there's a white man at Lone Moose that ye'll do well to cultivate wi' discretion. He's a man o' positive character, and scholarly beyond what ye'd imagine. When ye meet him, dinna be sanctimonious. His philosophy 'll no gibe wi' your religion, an' if ye attempt to impose a meenesterial attitude on him, it's no beyond possibility he'd flare up an' do ye bodily damage. I know him. If ye meet him man to man, ye'll find he'll meet ye half-way in everything but theology. He'll be the sort of friend ye'll need at Lone Moose. But dinna wave the Cloth in his face. For some reason that's to him like the proverbial red rag tae a bull. The last missionary tae Long Moose cam' awa wi' a lovely pair o' black eyes Sam Carr bestowed on him. I'm forewarnin' ye for yer ain good. Ye can decry material benefits a' ye like, but it'll be a

decided benefit if ye ha' Sam Carr for a friendly neighbor at Lone Moose."

"I don't deliberately seek religious controversy with any one," Thompson replied rather stiffly. "I have been sent by the Church to do what good I am able. That should not offend Mr. Carr, or any man."

"Nor will it," MacLeod returned. Then he added dryly, "It a' depends, as ye may discover, on the interpretation others put on your method o' doin' good. However, I wish ye luck. Stop in whenever ye happen along this way."

"I thank you, sir," Thompson smiled, "both for your hospitality, and your advice."

They shook hands. Thompson strode to the beach. Mike Breyette and Donald MacDonald stood barefooted in the shallow water. When Thompson had stepped awkwardly aboard and seated himself amidships, they lifted on the canoe and slid it gently off the shingle, leaped to their places fore and aft and gave way. A hundred yards off shore they lifted the dripping paddles in mute adieu to old Donald McPhee, smoking his pipe at the gable end of his cabin. MacLeod watched the gray canoe slip past the first point. When it vanished beyond that he turned back into his quarters with a shrug of his burly shoulders, and a few unintelligible phrases muttered under his breath.

Lone Moose Creek emptied into Lake Athabasca some forty miles east of Fort Pachugan. The village of Lone Moose lay another twenty-five miles or so up the stream. Thompson's canoemen carried with them a rag of a sail. This they hoisted to a fair wind that

held through the morning hours. Between that and steady paddling they made the creek mouth by sundown. There they lay overnight on a jutting sandbar where the mosquitoes plagued them less than on the brushy shore.

At dawn they pushed into the sinuous channel of Lone Moose, breasting its slow current with steady strokes, startling flocks of waterfowl at every bend, gliding hour after hour along this shadowy waterway that split the hushed reaches of the woods. It was very still and very somber and a little uncanny. The creek was but a thread in that illimitable forest which pressed so close on either hand. The sun at high noon could not dissipate the shadows that lurked among the close-ranked trees; it touched the earth and the creek with patches and streaks of yellow at rare intervals and left untouched the obscurity where the rabbits and the fur-bearing animals and all the wild life of the forest went furtively about its business. Once they startled a cow moose and her calf knee-deep in a shallow. The crash of their hurried retreat rose like a blare of brass horns cutting discordantly into the piping of a flute. But it died as quickly as it had risen. Even the beasts bowed before the invisible altars of silence.

About four in the afternoon Mike Breyette turned the nose of the canoe sharply into the bank.

The level of the forest floor lifted ten feet above Thompson's head so that he could see nothing beyond the earthy rim save the tops of trees. He kept his seat while Mike tied the bow to a birch trunk with a bit of rope. He knew that they expected to land him at his

destination before evening fell. This did not impress him as a destination. He did not know what Lone Moose would be like. The immensity of the North had left him rather incredulous. Nothing in the North, animate or inanimate, corresponded ever so little to his preconceived notions of what it would be like. His ideas of the natives had been tinctured with the flavor of Hiawatha and certain Leatherstocking tales which he had read with a sense of guilt when a youngster. He had really started out with the impression that Lone Moose was a collection of huts and tents about a log church and a missionary house. The people would be simple and high-minded, tillers of the soil in summer, trappers of fur in winter, humble seekers after the Light he was bringing. But he was not a fool, and he had been compelled to forego that illusion. Then he had surmised that Lone Moose might be a replica of Fort Pachugan. MacLeod had partly disabused his mind of that.

But he still could not keep out of his mind's eye a somewhat hazy picture of Lone Moose as a group of houses on the bank of a stream, with Indians and breeds — no matter how dirty and unkempt — going impassively about their business, an organized community, however rude. Here he saw nothing save the enfolding forest he had been passing through since dawn. He scarcely troubled to ask himself why they had stopped. Breyette and MacDonald were given to casual haltings. He sat in irritable discomfort brushing aside the hordes of mosquitoes that rose up from the weedy brink and the shore thickets to assail

his tender skin. He did not notice that MacDonald was waiting for him to move. Mike Breyette looked down on him from the top of the bank.

"Well, we here, M'sieu Thompson," he said.

"What?" Thompson roused himself. "Here? Where is the village?"

Breyette waved a hand upstream.

"She's 'roun' de nex' bend," said he. "Two-three hundred yard. Dees w'ere de meeshonaire have hees cabanne."

Thompson could not doubt Breyette's statement. He recalled now that Mike had once told him the mission quarters were built a little apart from the village. But he peered up through the screen of birch and willow with a swift wave of misgiving. The forest enclosed him like the blank walls of a cell. He shrank from it as a sensitive nature shrinks from the melancholy suggestiveness of an open grave, and he could not have told why he felt that strange form of depression. He was wholly unfamiliar with any form of introspective inquiry, any analysis of a mental state. He had never held sad intellectual inquest over a dead hope, nor groped blindly for a ray of light in the inky blackness of a soul's despair.

Nevertheless, he was conscious that he felt very much as he might have felt if, for instance, his guides had stopped anywhere in those somber woods and without rhyme or reason set him and his goods ashore and abandoned him forthwith. And when he crawled over the bow of the canoe and ascended the short, steep bank to a place beside Mike Breyette, this peculiar sense of

being forsaken grew, if anything, more acute, more appalling.

They stood on the edge of the bank, taking a reconnaissance, so to speak. The forest flowed about them like a sea. On Thompson's left hand it seemed to thin a trifle, giving a faint suggestion of open areas beyond. Beginning where they stood, some time in past years a square place had been slashed out of the timber, trees felled and partly burned, the stumps still standing and the charred trunks lying all askew as they fell. The unlovely confusion of the uncompleted task was somewhat concealed by a rank growth of weeds and grass. This half-hearted attack upon the forest had let the sunlight in. It blazed full upon a cabin in the center of the clearing, a square, squat structure of logs with a roof of poles and dirt. A door and a window faced the creek, a window of tiny panes, a door that stood partly open, sagging forlornly upon its hinges.

"Is *that* the house?" Thompson asked. It seemed to him scarcely credible. He suspected his guides, as he had before suspected them, of some rude jest at his expense.

"Dat's heem," Breyette answered. "Let's tak' leetle more close look on heem."

Thompson did not miss the faint note of commiseration in the half-breed's voice. It stung him a little, nearly made him disregard the spirit of abnegation he had been taught was a Christian's duty in his Master's service. He closed his lips on an impulsive protest against that barren unlovely spot, and stiffened his shoulders.

"I understand it has not been occupied for some time," he said as they moved toward the cabin.

But even forewarned as he was his heart sank a few degrees nearer to his square-toed shoes when he stepped over the threshold and looked about. Little, forgotten things recurred to him, matters touched upon lightly, airily, by the deacons and elders of the Board of Missions when his appointment was made. He recalled hearing of a letter in which his predecessor had renounced that particular field and the ministry together, with what to Thompson had seemed the blasphemous statement that the North was no place for either God or man.

The place was foul with dirt and cobwebs, full of a musty odor. The swallows had nested along the ridgepole. They fluttered out of the door, chattering protest against the invasion. Rat nests littered the corners and the brown rodents scuttled out with alarmed squeaks. The floor was of logs roughly hewn to flatness. Upon four blocks stood a rusty cookstove. A few battered, smoke-blackened pots and pans stood on a shelf and hung upon nails driven in the walls. A rough bedstead of peeled spruce poles stood in a corner. The remains of a bedtick moldered on the slats, its grass stuffing given over to the nests of the birds and rodents.

It was so utterly and dishearteningly foreign to the orderly arrangement, the meticulous neatness of the home wherein Thompson had grown to young manhood under the tutelage of the prim spinsters that he could scarcely accept as a reality that this, henceforth, was to be his abode.

He could only stand, with a feeling in his throat that was new in his experience of emotions, staring in dismay at this forlorn habitation abandoned to wind and weather, to the rats and the birds.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH MR. THOMPSON BEGINS TO WONDER PAINFULLY

To Breyette and MacDonald that forlorn cabin was after all nothing new or disheartening in their experience. They knew how a deserted house goes to rack and ruin. They knew also how to restore such an abandoned place to a measure of its original homeliness. And neither the spectacle of the one nor the labor of the other gave them any qualms. They were practical-minded men to whom musty, forsaken cabins, isolation, the hollow emptiness of the North, the sultry heat of the brief summer, the flies, the deep snows and iron frosts of the long winter, were a part of their life, the only life they knew.

But they were not wholly devoid of sentiment and perception. They recognized in Thompson a lively susceptibility to certain disagreeable things which they accepted as a matter of course. They saw that he was rather less capable of coping with such a situation than a ten-year-old native boy, that a dirty cabin in a lonely clearing made him stand aghast. And so — although their bargain with him was closed when they deposited him and his goods on the bank of Lone Moose — they set to work with energy to renovate his forlorn-looking abode.

They made short work of the rats' and the swallows' nests. Breyette quickly fashioned a broom of fine willow twigs, brought up a shovel from the canoe, and swept and shovelled the place out. MacDonald meanwhile cleared the weeds and grass from a space before the cabin and burned up the unseemly refuse. The stove fulfilled its functions perfectly despite the red rust of disuse. With buckets of boiling water they flooded and drenched the floor and walls till the interior was as fresh and clean as if new erected.

The place was habitable by sundown. While the long northern twilight held the three of them carried up the freight that burdened the canoe, and piled it in one corner, sacks of flour, sides of bacon and salt pork, boxes of dried fruit, the miscellaneous articles with which a man must supply himself when he goes into the wilderness.

That night they slept upon a meager thickness of blanket spread on the hard floor.

In the morning Mike went to work again. He showed Thompson how to arrange a mattress of hemlock boughs on the bed frame. It was a simple enough makeshift, soft and springy when Thompson spread his bedding over it. Then Mike superintended the final disposition of his supplies so that there would be some semblance of order instead of an indiscriminately mixed pile in which the article wanted was always at the bottom. Incidentally he strove to impart to Thompson certain rudimentary principles in the cooking of simple food. He illustrated the method of mixing a batch of baking-powder bread, and how to parboil salt pork

before cooking, explained to him the otherwise mysterious expansion of rice and beans and dried apples in boiling water, all of which Breyette was shrewd enough to realize that Thompson knew nothing about. He had a ready ear for instructions but a poor understanding of these matters. So Mike reiterated out of his experience of camp cooking, and Thompson tried to remember.

Meanwhile, MacDonald, who had vanished into the woods with a rifle in his hand at daybreak, came back about noon with a deer's carcass slung on his sturdy back. This, after it was skinned, the two breeds cut into pieces the thickness of a man's wrist and as long as they could make them, rubbed well with salt and hung on a stretched line in the sun. The purpose and preparation of " jerky " was duly elucidated to Thompson; rather profitless explanation, for he had no rifle, nor any knowledge whatever in the use of firearms.

" Bagosh, dat man Ah'm wonder w'ere hees raise," Mike said to his partner once when Thompson was out of earshot. " Hees ask more damfool question een ten minute dan a man hees answer een t'ree day. W'at hees gon' do all by heemself here Ah don' know 'tall, Mac. Bagosh, no! "

By mid-afternoon all that was possible in the way of settling their man had been accomplished, even to a pile of firewood sufficient to last him two weeks. MacDonald contributed that after one brief exhibition of Thompson's axemanship. Short of remaining on the spot like a pair of swarthy guardian angels there was no further help they could give him, and their solicitude

did not run to that beneficent extreme. And so about three o'clock Mike Breyette surveyed the orderly cabin, the pile of chopped wood, and the venison drying in the sun, and said briskly:

"Well, M'sieu Thompson, Ah theenk we go show you hon Lone Moose village now. Dere's one w'ite man Ah don' know 'tall. But der's breed familee call Lachlan, eef she's not move 'way somew'ere. Dat familee she's talk Henglish, and ver' fond of preacher. S'pose we go mak leetle veesit hon dem Lachlan, eh? Ah theenk us two feller we're gon' heet dat water weeth de paddle een de morneeng."

A man does not easily forego habits that have become second nature. Breyette and MacDonald put on their dilapidated hats, filled their pipes, and were ready for anything from a social call to a bear hunt. Thompson had to shave, wash up, brush his hair, put on a tie and collar, which article of dress he donned without a thought that the North was utterly devoid of laundries, that he would soon be reduced to flannel shirts which he must wash himself. His preparations gave the breeds another trick of his to grin slyly over. But Thompson was preparing himself to face the units of his future congregation, and he went about it precisely as he would have gone about getting ready for a Conference, or a cup of tea with a meeting of the Ladies' Aid. Eventually, however, the three set out across the trunk-littered clearing.

The thin place in the belt of timber to the northward proved barely a hundred yards deep. On the farther side the brushy edge of the woods gave on the open

meadow around which the Lone Moose villagers had built their cabins. Thompson swept the crescent with a glance, taking in the dozen or so dwellings huddling as it were under the protecting wings of the forest, and his gaze came to rest on the more impressive habitation of Sam Carr.

"Dat's white man married hon Enjun woman," Breyette responded to Thompson's inquiry. "Ah don' never see heem maself. Lachlan she's leev over there."

Left to himself Thompson would probably have gravitated first to a man of his own blood, even though he had been warned to approach Carr with diplomacy. But there was no sign of life about the Carr place, and his men were headed straight for their objective, walking hurriedly to get away from the hungry swarms of mosquitoes that rose out of the grass. Thompson followed them. Two weeks in their company, with a steadily growing consciousness of his dependence upon them, had inclined him to follow their lead.

They found Lachlan at home, a middle-aged Scotch half-breed with a house full of sons and daughters ranging from the age of four to twenty. How could they all be housed in three small rooms was almost the first dubious query which presented itself to Thompson. His mind, to his great perplexity, seemed to turn more upon incongruities than upon his real mission there. That is, to Thompson they seemed incongruities. The little things that go to make up a whole were each impinging upon him with a force he could not understand. He could not, for instance, tell why he thought only with difficulty, with extreme haziness,

of the great good he desired to accomplish at Lone Moose, and found his attention focussing sharply upon the people, their manner of speech, their surroundings, even upon so minor a detail as a smudge of flour upon the hand that Mrs. Lachlan extended to him. She was a fat, dusky-skinned woman, apparently regarding Thompson with a feeling akin to awe. The entire family, which numbered at least nine souls, spoke in the broad dialect of their paternal ancestors from the heather country overseas.

Thompson spent an hour there, an hour which was far from conducive to a cheerful survey of the field wherein his spiritual labors would lie. Aside from Sam Carr, who appeared to be looked upon as the Nestor of the village, the Lachlans were the only persons who either spoke or understood a word of English. And Thompson found himself more or less tongue-tied with them, unable to find any common ground of intercourse. They were wholly illiterate. As a natural consequence the world beyond the Athabasca region was as much of an unknown quantity to them as the North had been to Thompson before he set foot in it — as much of its needs and customs were yet, for that matter. The Lachlan virtues of simplicity and kindliness were overcast by obvious dirt and a general slackness. In so far as religion went if they were — as Breyette had stated — fond of preachers, it was manifestly because they looked upon a preacher as a very superior sort of person, and not because of his gospel message.

For when Mrs. Lachlan hospitably brewed a cup of tea and Thompson took the opportunity of making his

customary prayer before food an appeal for divine essence to be showered upon these poor sinful creatures of earth, the Lachlan family rose from its several knees with an air of some embarrassing matter well past. And they hastened to converse volubly upon the weather and the mosquitoes and Sam Carr's garden and a new canoe that Lachlan's boys were building, and such homely interests. As to church and service they were utterly dumb, patently unable to follow Thompson's drift when he spoke of those things. If they had souls that required salvation they were blissfully unconscious of the fact.

But they urged him to come again, when he rose to leave. They seemed to regard him as a very great man, whose presence among them was an honor, even if his purposes were but dimly apprehended.

The three walked back across the meadow, Breyette and MacDonald chattering lightly, Thompson rather preoccupied. It was turning out so different from what he had fondly imagined it would be. He had envisaged a mode of living and a manner of people, a fertile field for his labors, which he began to perceive resentfully could never have existed save in his imagination. He had been full of the impression, and the advice and information bestowed upon him by the Board of Missions had served to heighten the impression, that in Lone Moose he would fill a crying want. And he was not so obtuse as to fail of perceiving that no want of him or his message existed. It was discouraging to know that he must strive mightily to awaken a sense of need before he could begin to fulfill his appointed

function of showing these people how to satisfy that need.

Apart from these spiritual perplexities he found himself troubled over practical matters. His creed of blind trust in Providence did not seem so sound and true. He found himself dreading the hour when his swarthy guides would leave him to his lonely quarters. He beheld terrible vistas of loneliness, a state of feeling to which he had always been a stranger. He foresaw a series of vain struggles over that rusty cookstove. It did him no good to recall that he had been told in the beginning that he would occupy the mission quarters, that he must provide himself with ample supplies of food, that he might have to prepare that food himself.

His mind had simply been unable to envisage the sordid reality of these things until he faced them. Now that he did face them they seemed more terrible than they really were.

Lying wakeful on his bed that night, listening to the snoring of the half-breeds on the floor, to the faint murmur of a wind that stirred the drooping boughs of the spruce, he reviewed his enthusiasms and his tenuous plans — and slipped so far into the slough of despond as to call himself a misguided fool for rearing so fine a structure of dreams upon so slender a foundation as this appointment to a mission in the outlying places. He blamed the Board of Missions. Obviously that august circle of middle-aged and worthy gentlemen were sadly ignorant of the North.

Whereupon, recognizing the trend of his thought, the Reverend Wesley Thompson turned upon himself

with a bitter accusation of self-seeking, and besought earnestly the gift of an humble spirit from Above.

But the deadly pin-points of discontent and discouragement were still pricking him when he fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

FURTHER ACQUAINTANCE

Mike Breyette took a last look over his shoulder as the current and the thrust of two paddles carried the canoe around the first bend. Thompson stood on the bank, watching them go.

"Bagosh, dat man hees gon' have dam toff time, Ah theenk," Breyette voiced his conviction. "Feller lak heem got no beesness for be here 'tall."

"He didna have tae come here," MacDonald answered carelessly. "An' he disna have tae stay."

"Oh, sure, Ah know dat, me," Mike agreed. "All same hees feel bad."

Which was a correct, if brief, estimate of Mr. Thompson's emotions as he stood on the bank watching the gray canoe slip silently out of his ken. That gave him a keener pang, a more complete sense of loss, than he had ever suffered at parting with any one or anything. It was to him like taking a last look before a leap in the dark. Thrown entirely upon his own resources he felt wholly inadequate, found his breast filled with incomprehensible misgivings. The work he had come there to do seemed to have lost much of its force as a motive, as an inspiration. He felt himself — so far as his mission to Lone Moose was concerned — in the

anomalous position of one compelled to make bricks without straw.

He was, in a word, suffering an acute attack of loneliness.

That was why the empty space of the clearing affected him with a physical shrinking, why the neatly arranged interior of his cabin seemed hollow, abandoned, terribly dispiriting. He longed for the sound of a human voice, found himself listening for such a sound. The stillness was not like the stillness of a park, nor an empty street, nor any of the stillnesses he had ever experienced. It was not a kindly, restful stillness, — not to him. It was the hollow hush of huge spaces emptied of all life. Life was at his elbow almost but he could not make himself aware of that. The forested wilderness affected him much as a small child is affected by the dark. He was not afraid of this depressing sense of emptiness, but it troubled him.

Before nine o'clock in the forenoon had rolled around he set off with the express purpose of making himself acquainted with Sam Carr. Carr was a white man, a scholar, MacLeod had said. Passing over the other things MacLeod had mentioned for his benefit Thompson, in his dimly realized need of some mental stimulus, could not think of a white man and a scholar being aught but a special blessing in that primeval solitude. Thompson had run across that phrase in books — primeval solitude. He was just beginning to understand what it meant.

He set out upon his quest of Sam Carr with a good deal of unfounded hope. In his own world, beginning

with the churchly leanings of the spinster aunts, through the successive steps of education and his ultimate training for the ministry as a profession, the theological note had been the note in which he reasoned and thought and felt. His environment had grounded him in the belief that all the world vibrated in unison with the theological harmonies. He had never had any doubts or equivocations. Faith was everything, and he had abundance of faith. As a matter of fact, until he encountered MacLeod, the factor of Fort Pachugan, he had never crossed swords with a man open and sincere in disbelief based on rational grounds. He had found those who evaded and some who were indifferent, many who compromised, never before a sweeping denial. He could not picture an atheist as other than a perverted monster, a moral degenerate, the personification of all evil. This was his conception of such as denied his God. Blasphemers. Foredoomed to hell. Yet he had found MacLeod hospitable, ready with kindly advice, occupying a position of trust in the service of a great company. Was it after all possible that the essence of Christianity might not be the exclusive possession of Christians?

Insensibly he had to modify certain sweeping convictions. He was not conscious of this inner compulsion when he concluded to try and meet Sam Carr without making theology an issue. Somehow this man Carr began to loom in the background of his thought as a commanding figure. At least, Thompson said to himself as he passed through the fringe of timber, Sam Carr by all accounts was a person to whom an educated

man could speak in words of more than two syllables without meeting the blank stare of incomprehension.

The Lachlans were worthy people enough, but — He shook his head despondently. As for the Crees — well, he had been at Lone Moose less than forty-eight hours and he was wondering if the Board of Home Missions always shot as blindly at a distant mark. It would take him a year to learn the first smatterings of their tongue. A year! He had understood that the Lone Moose Crees were partly under civilized influences. Certainly he had believed that his predecessors in the field had laid some sort of foundation for the work he was to carry on. It was considered a matter of course that the mission quarters were livable, that some sort of meeting place had been provided.

There was a monetary basis for that belief. Some two thousand dollars had been expended, or perhaps the better word would be appropriated, for that purpose. Mr. Thompson could not quite understand what had become of this sum. There was nothing but a rat-ridden shack on a half-cleared acre in the edge of the forest. There had never been anything else. Nothing had been accomplished. Thompson shook his head again. His first report would be a shock to the Board of Home Missions.

He bore straight for Sam Carr's house. While still some distance away he made out two men seated on the porch. As he drew nearer a couple of nondescript dogs rushed noisily to meet him. Thompson's general unfamiliarity with the outdoor world extended to dogs. But he had heard sometime, somewhere, that it was well

to put on a bold front with barking curs. He acted upon this theory, and the dogs kept their teeth out of his person, though their clamor rose unabated until one of the men harshly commanded them to be quiet. Thompson came up to the steps. The two men nodded. Their eyes rested upon him in frank curiosity.

"My name is Thompson." His diffidence, verging upon forthright embarrassment, precipitated him into abruptness. He was addressing the older man, a spare-built man with a trim gray beard and a disconcerting direct gaze. "I am a newcomer to this place. The factor of Fort Pachugan spoke of a Mr. Carr here. Have I — er — the — ah — pleasure of addressing that gentleman?"

Carr's gray eyes twinkled, the myriad of fine creases radiating from their outer corners deepened.

"MacLeod mentioned me, eh? Did he intimate that meeting me might prove a doubtful pleasure for a gentleman of your calling?"

That momentarily served to heighten Mr. Thompson's embarrassment — like a flank attack while he was in the act of waving a flag of truce. But he perceived that there was no malice in the words, only a flash of ironic humor. Carr chuckled dryly.

"Meet Mr. Tommy Ashe, Mr. Thompson," he said. "Mr. Ashe is, like yourself, a newcomer to Lone Moose. You may be able to exchange mutual curses on the country. People usually do at first."

"I've been hereabouts six months," Ashe smiled as he rose to shake hands. (Carr's friendliness seemed a trifle negative, reserved; he had not offered his hand.)

"That means newly come, as time is reckoned here," Carr remarked. "It takes at least a generation to make one permanent. Have a seat, Mr. Thompson. What do you think, so far, of the country you have selected for the scene of your operations?"

The slightly ironic inflection was not lost upon Thompson. It nettled him a little, but it was too intangible to be resented, and in any case he had no ready defence against that sort of thing. He took a third chair between the two of them and occupied himself a moment exterminating a few mosquitoes which had followed him from the grassy floor of the meadow and now slyly sought to find painful lodgment upon his face and neck.

"To tell the truth," he said at last, "everything is so different from my expectations that I find myself a bit uncertain. One finds — well — certain drawbacks."

"Material or spiritual?" Carr inquired gravely.

The Reverend Thompson considered.

"Both," he answered briefly.

This was the most candid admission he had ever permitted himself. Carr laughed quietly.

"Well," said he, "we are a primitive folk in a primitive region. But I daresay you hope to accomplish a vast change for the better in us, if not in the country?"

Again there was that suggestion of mockery, veiled, scarcely perceptible, a matter of inflection. Mr. Thompson found himself uttering an entirely unpremeditated reply.

"Which I daresay you doubt, Mr. Carr. You seem

to be fully aware of my mission here, and rather dubious as to its merit."

Carr smiled.

"News travels fast in a country where even a passing stranger is a notable event," he remarked. "Naturally one draws certain conclusions when one hears that a minister has arrived in one's vicinity. As to my doubts — first and last I've seen three different men sent here by your Board of Home Missions. They have made no more of an impression than a pebble chucked into the lake. Your Board of Missions must be a visionary lot. They should come here in a body. This country would destroy some of their cherished illusions."

"A desire to serve is not an illusion," Thompson said defensively.

"One would have to define service before one could dispute that," Carr returned casually. "What I mean is that the people who send you here have not the slightest conception of what they send you to. When you get here you find yourself rather at sea. Isn't it so?"

"In a sense, yes," Thompson reluctantly admitted.

"Oh, well," Carr said, with a gesture of dismissing the subject, "that is your private business in any case. We won't get on at all if we begin by discussing theology, and dissecting the theological motive and activities. Do you hunt or fish at all, Mr. Thompson?"

Mr. Thompson did not, and expressed no hankering for such pursuits. There came a lapse in the talk. Carr got out his pipe and began stuffing the bowl of it with tobacco. Tommy Ashe sat gazing impassively over the meadow, slapping at an occasional mosquito.

"Tommy might give you a few pointers on game," Carr remarked at last. "He has the sporting instinct. It hasn't become a commonplace routine with him yet, a matter of getting meat, as it has to the rest of us up here."

Ashe made his first vocal contribution.

"If you're going to be about here for awhile," said he pleasantly, "you'll find it interesting to dodge about after things in the woods with a gun. Keeps you fit, for one thing. Lots of company in a dog and a gun. Is it a permanent undertaking, this missionary work of yours, Mr. Thompson?"

"We hope to make it so," Mr. Thompson responded.

"I should say you've taken on the deuce of a job," Tommy commented frankly.

Thompson had no inclination to dispute that. He had periods of thinking so himself.

The conversation languished again.

Without ever having been aware of it Thompson's circle of friends and acquaintances had been people of wordy inclination. Their thoughts dripped unceasingly from their tongue's end like water from a leaky faucet. He had never come in contact with a type of men who keep silent unless they have something to say, who think more than they speak. The spinster aunts had been voluble persons, full of small chatter, women of no mental reservations whatever. The young men of his group had not been much different. The reflective attitude as opposed to the discursive was new to him. New and embarrassing. He felt impelled to talk, and while he groped uncertainly for some congenial

subject he grew more and more acutely self-conscious. He felt that these men were calmly taking his measure. Especially Sam Carr.

He wanted to go on talking. He protested against their intercourse congealing in that fashion. But he could find no opening. His conversational stock-in-trade, he had the sense to realize, was totally unlike theirs. He could do nothing but sit still, remain physically inert while he was mentally in a state of extreme unrest. He ventured a banality about the weather. Carr smiled faintly. Tommy Ashe observed offhand that the heat was beastly, but not a patch to blizzards and frost. Then they were silent again.

Thompson had effected a sort of compromise with his principles when he sought Carr. He had more or less consciously resolved to keep his calling in the background, to suppress the evangelical tendency which his training had made nearly second nature. This for the sake of intelligent companionship. He was like a man sentenced to solitary confinement. Even the temporary presence of a jailer is a boon to such, a break in the ghastly solitude. But he was fast succumbing to a despair of reaching across the barrier of this critical silence and he was about to rise and leave when he happened to look about and see Sophie Carr standing within arm's length, gazing at him with a peculiar intentness, a mild look of surprise upon her vivid young face, a trace of puzzlement.

A most amazing thing happened to Mr. Thompson. His heart leaped.

Perhaps it rarely happens that a normal, healthy

man reaches a comparative degree of maturity without experiencing a quickening of his blood in the presence of a woman. Yet it cannot be gainsaid that it does happen. It was so in Thompson's case. Staring into the clear pools of Sophie Carr's gray eyes some strange quality of attraction in a woman first dawned on him. Something that made him feel a passionate sense of incompleteness.

He did not think this. The singular longing had flamed up like a beacon within him. It had nothing to do with his mental processes. It was purely an instinctive revelation. A blind man whose sight has been restored, upon whose eager vision bursts suddenly all the bright beauty of sun and sky and colorful landscape, could have been no more bewildered than he. It was as if indeed he had been blind.

All the women he had ever known seemed pale and colorless beside this girl standing near, her head a little aside as she looked at him. There was not a detail of her that escaped him, that failed to make its appeal, from the perfect oval of her face down to the small feet in bead-ornamented moccasins. A woman's eyes, her hair, her hands, her bearing — these things had never obtruded upon his notice before. Yet he saw now that a shaft of sunlight on her hair made it shimmer like ripe wheat straw, that her breast was full and rounded, her lips red and sweetly curved. But it was not alone that swift revelation of seductive beauty, or warm human desirableness, that stirred him so deeply, that afflicted him with those queer uncomfortable sensations. He found himself struggling with a sense of guilt, of

shame. The world, the flesh, and the devil seemed leagued against his peace of mind.

He was filled with an incredulous wonder as to what manner of thing this was which had blown through the inner recesses of his being like a gusty wind through an open door. He had grown to manhood with nothing but a cold, passionless tolerance in his attitude toward women. Technically he was aware of sex, advised as to its pitfalls and temptations; actually he could grasp nothing of the sort. A very small child is incapable of associating pain with a hot iron until the hot iron has burned him. Even then he can scarcely correlate cause and effect. Neither could Thompson. No woman had ever before stirred his pulse to an added beat.

But this — this subtle, mysterious emanation from a smiling girl at his elbow singed him like a flame. If he had been asleep he was now in a moment breathlessly, confusedly awake.

The commotion was all inward, mental. Outwardly he kept his composure, and the only sign of that turmoil was a tinge of color that rose in his face. And as if there was some mysterious mode of communication established between them a faint blush deepened the delicate tint of Sophie Carr's cheeks. Thompson rose. So did Tommy Ashe with some haste when he perceived her there.

"No, no," she protested. "Keep your chairs, please."

"Mr. Thompson," Carr's keen old eyes flickered between the two men and the girl. "My daughter. Mr.

Thompson is the latest leader of the forlorn hope at Lone Moose, Sophie."

Mr. Thompson murmured some conventional phrase. He was mightily disturbed without knowing why he was so disturbed, and rather fearful of showing this incomprehensible state. The girl's manner put him a little at his ease. She gave him her hand, soft warm fingers that he had a mad impulse to press. He wondered why he felt like that. He wondered why even the tones of her voice gave him a thrill of pleasure.

"So you are the newest missionary to Lone Moose?" she said. "I wish you luck."

Although her voice was full, throaty like a meadow lark's, her tone carried the same sardonic inflection he had noticed in her father's comment on his mission. It pained Thompson. He had no available weapon against that sort of attack. But the girl did not pursue the matter. She said to her father:

"Crooked Tree's oldest son is in the kitchen and wants to speak to you, Dad."

Carr rose. So did Thompson. He wanted to get away, to think, to fortify himself somehow against this siren call in his blood. He was sadly perplexed. Measured by his own standards, even to harbor such thoughts as welled up in his mind was a sinful weakness of the flesh. He was in as much anxiety to get away from Carr's as he had been to find a welcome there.

"I think I shall be moving along," he said to Carr. "I'll say good-day, sir."

Carr thrust out a brown sinewy hand with the first trace of heartiness he had shown.

"Come again when you feel like it," he invited. "When you have time and inclination we'll match our theories of the human problem, maybe. Of course we'll disagree. But my bark is worse than my bite, no matter what you've heard."

He strode off. Sophie bowed to Thompson, nodded to Tommy Ashe, and followed her father. Ashe got up, stretched his sturdy young arms above his fair, curly head. He was perhaps a year or two older than Thompson, a little thicker through the chest, and not quite so tall. One imagined rightly that he was very strong, that he could be swift and purposeful in his movements, despite an apparent deliberation. His face was boyishly expressive. He had a way of smiling at trifles. And one did not have to puzzle over his nationality. He was English. His accent and certain intonations established that.

He picked up a gun now from where it stood against the wall, whistled shrilly, and a brown dog appeared hastily from somewhere in the grass, wagging his tail in anticipation.

"Mind if I poke along with you," he said to Thompson. "There's a slough over beyond your diggin's where I go now and then to pick up a duck or two."

They fell into step across the meadow.

"Our host," Thompson observed, "is not quite the type one expects to find here — permanently. I understand he has been here a long time."

"Fifteen years," Tommy supplied cheerfully. "Deuce of a time to be buried alive, eh? Carr hasn't got rusty, though. No. Mind like a steel trap, that

man. Curious sort of individual. You ought to see the books he's got. Amazing. Science, philosophy, the poets — all sorts. Don't try arguing theology with him unless you're quite advanced. Of course, I know the church is adapting itself to modern thought, in a way. But he'll tie you in a bowknot if you hold to the old theological doctrines. Fact. Carr's scholarly sort, but awfully radical. Awfully."

"It's queer," said Thompson, "why a man like that should bury himself here so long. Is it a fact that he is married to a native woman? His daughter now — one wouldn't imagine her —"

"No fear," Tommy Ashe interrupted. "Carr's got an Indian woman, right enough. They've got three mixed-blood youngsters. But his daughter —"

He gave Thompson a quick sidelong glance.

"Sophie's pure blood," said he. "She's a thoroughbred."

He said it almost challengingly.

CHAPTER VI

CERTAIN PERPLEXITIES

From the direction of the slough two shots sounded, presently followed by two more. Then the gleeful yipping of Tommy's Ashe's retriever, and Tommy's stentorian encouragement:

"That's the boy. Fetch him."

Close upon this Mr. Thompson's up-pricked ear detected another voice, one that immediately set up in him an involuntary eagerness of listening, a clear, liquid voice that called:

"Oh, Tommy, there's another wounded one, swimming away. Quick!"

Pow! Tommy's twelve-gauge cracked again. The two voices called laughingly back and forth across the slough, mingled with the excited barking of the brown dog as he retrieved the slaughtered ducks. After a time silence fell. Thompson's nose detected an odor. He turned hastily to his stove. But he had listened too long. The biscuits in his oven were smoking.

That did not matter greatly in itself. It was merely one of a long procession of culinary disasters. He could not, somehow, contrive to prepare food in the simple manner of Mike Breyette's instructions. If the biscuits had not scorched probably they would have been hopelessly soggy, dismal things compared to the

brown discs Mike had turned out of the same oven. One was as bad as the other. Nothing seemed to work out right. Nothing ever tasted right. Only a healthy hunger enabled him to swallow the unsavory messes he concocted in the name of food.

He had been at Lone Moose two weeks now. His real work, his essential labor in that untilled field, was no farther advanced. He made about the same progress as a missionary that he made as a cook. In so far as Lone Moose was concerned he accomplished nothing because, like Archimedes, he lacked a foothold from which to apply his leverage. He had the intelligence to perceive that these people had no pressing wants which they looked to him to supply, that they were apparently impervious to any message he could deliver. His power to deliver a message was vitiated by this utter absence of receptivity. He was, and realized that he was, as superfluous in Lone Moose as sterling silver and cut glass in a house where there is neither food nor drink.

Also he was no longer so secure in the comfortable belief that all things work for an ultimate good. He was not so sure that a sparrow, or even an ordained servant of God, might not fall and the Almighty be none the wiser. The material considerations which he had always scorned pressed upon him in an unescapable manner. There was no getting away from them. Thrown at last upon his own resources he began to take stock of his needs, his instincts, his impulses, and to compare them with the needs and instincts and impulses of a more Godless humanity, — and he could not

escape certain conclusions. Faith may move mountains, but chiefly through the medium of a shovel. When a man is hungry his need is for food. When he is lonely he craves companionship. When he grieves he desires sympathy. And the Providence Mr. Thompson had been taught to lean so hard upon did not chop his wood, cook his meals, furnish him with congenial society, comfort him when he was sad.

"Religion or nonreligion, belief in a personal, immanent God or a rank materialism that holds to a purely mechanical theory of the universe, it doesn't make much difference which you hold to if you do not set yourself up as the supreme authority and insist that the other fellow must believe as you do.

"Because, my dear sir, you cannot escape material factors. The human organism can't exist without food, clothing, and shelter. Society cannot attain to a culture which tends to soften the harshnesses of existence, without leisure in which to develop that culture. Machinery and science and art weren't handed to humanity done up in a package. Man only attained to these things through a long process of evolution, and he only attained them by the use of his muscle and the exercise of his intellect. Strength and skill — plus application. Nothing else gets either an individual or a race forward. Don't you see the force of that? Here is man with his fundamental, undeniable needs. Here is the earth with the fulness thereof. There's nothing mysterious or supernatural about it. Brain and brawn applied to the problems of living. That's all. And you can't dodge it. The first, pressing re-

quirements of any man can only be filled in two ways. First by working and planning and getting for himself. Second by being able to compel the strength and skill of others to function for him so that his needs will be supplied; in other words, by some turn of circumstances, or some dominant quality in himself, to get something for nothing."

Sam Carr had delivered himself of this as a wind-up to a conversation with Thompson the evening before. Now, while his forgotten biscuits scorched and he listened to Tommy Ashe and Sophie Carr taking their toll of meat from the flocks of waterfowl, he was thinking over what Carr had said. He dissented. Oh, he dissented with a vigor that was almost bitterness, because the smiling quirk of Sam Carr's lips when he uttered the last sentence gave it something of a personal edge. However it was meant, Thompson could not help taking it that way. And Mr. Thompson's desire was to give — to give lavishly. Only here in this forsaken corner of the world he seemed to have nothing to give that was of any value.

He was, at the same time, discovering in himself personal needs to which he had never given a thought, sordid every-day necessities the satisfaction of which had always been at hand, unquestioned, taken for granted much as one takes the sun and the air for granted. His meals had been provided. His bed had been provided. The funds which had clothed and educated him and trained him for the ministry had been provided, and likewise his transportation to the scene of his endeavors. How, he had not known except in

the vaguest way, he had not particularly inquired, any more than the child inquires the whence and the why of luscious berries he finds growing upon a bush in the garden.

Not until he was torn by the roots out of the old, ordered environment and flung headlong into an environment where cause and effect are linked close did he consider these things. Materially he was getting a first-hand lesson in economics — and domestic science of a sort! Spiritually he was a little bit aghast, amazed that the Almighty did not personally intervene to save a man from his own inefficiency. He began to grasp the hitherto unnoted fact that meals and a bed and fires and clothes and all the other stark necessities involved labor of the hands, skilful exercise of the thought-function.

If this was so, he, Wesley Thompson, twenty-five years of age and a minister of the gospel, was deeply in debt — unless he denied the justice of giving value for value received. He had received much; he had returned nothing except perfunctory thanks. And what had he to give? Even to him, transcendent as was his faith that the glory of man was but the reflected glory of God, that faith was not a commodity to be bartered.

He did not think these things in these terms. He found himself becoming involved in a maze of speculation, in which he could only grope feebly for words to define the unrest that was in him.

While he sat at his small table of rough-hewn boards with his scorched, unappetizing biscuits, ill-cooked pota-

toes and bacon, and a pot of tea that he could never brew to his liking (and Mr. Thompson, from a considerable amount of juggling afternoon teacups, had acquired a nice taste in that beverage) he saw Tommy Ashe and Sophie Carr pass along one edge of his clearing, a cluster of bright-winged ducks slung over Tommy's shoulder, their voices floating across to him as if they came down a long corridor. They disappeared toward Lone Moose through the timber, and Mr. Thompson sat brooding over his lonely meal until he realized with a start that his mind was concentrating upon Sophie Carr with a disturbing insistence.

The plague of mosquitoes had somewhat abated. In the early morning and for a time in the evening, and also when rain dampened the atmosphere, these pests still kept a man's hands busy warding them off. But through the dry heat of the day he could go abroad in reasonable comfort.

So now Mr. Thompson washed up his dishes in a fashion to make the lips of a careful housekeeper pucker in disdain, clapped on his broken-rimmed straw hat and sallied forth.

He was full of an earnest desire to do good, as he defined doing good. He had come here for that purpose, backed by an organization for just such good work. This evangelical fire burned strong in him despite the crude shifts he was put to, the loneliness, the perplexities and trials of the spirit. Just as an educated humanitarian coming upon an illiterate people would gladly banish their illiteracy, so Thompson was resolved to banish what he deemed the spiritual dark-

ness of these primitive folk. Holding as he did to the orthodoxy of sin and salvation, of a literal heaven and a nebulous sort of hell, he deemed it his business to show them with certainty the paths that led to each.

But he could not reach them unless he could speak their tongue, he could not gather them about him in the open meadow as the Man of Galilee gathered his disciples about him. The climate was against that simple procedure. Therefore he postulated two things as necessary to make a beginning — to learn the tribal language and to build a church.

He was making an attempt at both, and making little more progress than he made in the culinary art. Only a naturally vigorous stomach enabled him to assimilate the messes he cooked without suffering acute indigestion. Likewise only a naïve turn of mind enabled him to ward off mental indigestion in his struggles with the language. Whatever the defects of his training for what he considered his life work, he had considerable power of application. He might get discouraged, but he was not a quitter. He kept trying. This took the form of studying the Athabascan gutturals with the aid of Lachlan's second son, a boy of eighteen. For an hour in the forenoon and the same in the evening he struggled with pronunciations and meanings like a child learning the alphabet, forgetting, like the child, a good deal of it between lessons. And he had begun work on a log building twenty by thirty feet, that was to be a meeting-house.

He did not get on with this very fast. He laid his foundation in the edge of the timber to lessen the dis-

tance his material must be moved. He had to fell trees, to lop off the branches, and cut the trunks to proper length, then roll them with infinite effort to their proper place in the structure. He could only gather how a log building could be erected by asking Lachlan, and by taking the Lone Moose cabins for his model. And he was a fearful and wonderful axeman. His log ends looked as if chewed by a beaver, except that they lacked the beaver's neatness of finish. His feet suffered manifold hairbreadth escapes from the sharp blade. He could never guess which way a tree would fall. For a week's work he had got two courses of logs laid in position.

He did not allow his mind to dwell on the ultimate outcome of this task, because he was uneasily aware that Lone Moose was smiling slyly behind its brown hand at him and his works. In his mind there was nothing for it but a church. He had tried one Sunday service at Lachlan's house, with Lachlan senior to interpret his words. The Indians had come. Indeed, they had come en masse. They packed the room he spoke in, big and little, short, chunky natives, and tall, thin-faced ones, and the overflow spilled into the kitchen beyond. The day was very hot, the roof low, the windows closed. There was a vitiation of the atmosphere that was not helped by a strong bodily odor, a stout and sturdy smell that came near to sickening Mr. Thompson. He was extraordinarily glad when he got outside. That closeness — to speak mildly — coupled with the heavy, copper-red faces, impassive as masks, impersonally listening with scarcely a flicker of the eye-

lids, made Thompson forswear another attempt to preach until he could speak to them in their own tongue and speak to them in a goodly place of worship where a man's thoughts would not be imperiously distracted by a pressing need of ventilation.

Coming now to the site he had chosen, he stood for a moment casting an eye over the scene of his undertaking. The longer he looked at it the more of an undertaking it seemed. He had heard Lachlan speak of two men felling trees and putting up a sixteen-foot cabin complete from foundation to ridgelog in three days. He did not see how it could be done. He was thoroughly incredulous of that statement. But he did expect to roof in that church before the snow fell. Its walls would be consecrated with sweat and straining muscles. It would be a concrete accomplishment. The instinct to create, the will to fashion and mold, to see something take form under his hands, had begun to stir in him.

Axe in hand, he set to work. He had learned the first lesson of manual labor — that a man cannot swing his arms and breathe deeply if his body is swaddled in clothes. His coat came off and his vest and his hat, all slung across a fallen tree. Presently, as he warmed up, his outer shirt joined the discarded garments.

Stripped for action in a literal sense he did not in the least conform to the clerical figure. He was the antithesis of asceticism, of gentleness, of spiritual and scholarly repose. He was simply a big man lustily chopping, red in the face from his exertions, beads of sweat standing out on brow and cheek, his sturdy neck

all a-glisten with moisture. Under his thin, short-sleeved undershirt his biceps rippled and played. The flat muscle-bands across his broad chest slackened and tightened as his arms swung. For Mr. Thompson had been fashioned by Nature in a generous mood. He was not a heroic figure, but he was big and built as a man should be, deep in the chest, flat-backed, very straight when he stood erect. He had escaped the scholarly stoop. If his muscles were soft they were in a fair way to become hardened.

He was more or less unconscious of all this. He had never thought of his body as being strong or well-shaped, because he had never used it, never pitted his strength against the strength of other men, never worked, never striven. It had never been necessary for him to do so. He had been taught that pride of that sort was sinful, and he had accepted the teaching rather too literally.

Already a curious sort of change was manifesting in him. His blue eyes had a different expression than one would have observed in them during — well, during the period of his theological studies, shall we say, when the state of his soul and the state of other people's souls was the only consideration. One would have been troubled to make out any pronounced personality then. He was simply a studious young man with a sanctimonious air. But now that the wind and the sun had somewhat turned his fair skin and brought out a goodly crop of freckles, now that the vigor of his movements and the healthy perspiration had rumpled up his reddish-brown hair and put a wave in it, he could —

standing up on his log — easily have passed for a husky woodsman; until some experienced eye observed him make such sorry work of a woodsman's task. He had acquired no skill with the axe. That takes time. But he made vigorous endeavor, and he was beginning to feel strength flow through him, to realize it as a potential blessing. Now that the soreness was working out of his sinews it gave him a peculiar elation to lay hold of a log-end, to heave until his arms and back grew rigid, and to feel the heavy weight move. That exultant sense of physical power was quite new and rather puzzling to him. He could not understand why he enjoyed chopping logs and moving them about, and yet was prone to grow moody, to be full of disquieting perplexities when he sat down to think.

He had been at work for perhaps two hours. He was resting. To be explicit, he was standing on a fallen tree. Between his feet there was a notch cut half-way through the wood. In this white gash the blade of his axe was driven solidly, and he rested his hands on the rigid haft while he stood drawing gulps of forest-scented air into his lungs.

Mr. Thompson was not gifted with eyes in the back of his head. His hearing was keen enough, but the soft, turfy earth absorbed footfalls, especially when that foot was shod with a buckskin moccasin. So he did not see Sophie Carr, nor hear her until a thought that was running in his mind slipped off the end of his tongue.

"This is going to make a terrible amount of labor." He said this aloud, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"And a terrible waste of labor," Sophie answered him.

He looked quickly over one shoulder, saw her standing there, got down off his log — blushing a little at his comparative nakedness. It seemed to him that he must appear shockingly nude, since the upper part of his body was but thinly covered by a garment that opened wide over his breast. He felt a good deal like a shy girl first appearing on the beach in an abbreviated bathing suit. But Sophie seemed unconscious of his embarrassment, or the cause of it. However, Mr. Thompson picked up his coat, and felt more at ease when he had slipped it on. He sat down, still breathing heavily from his recent exertions.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Oh, well," she said — and left the sentence unfinished, save by an outward motion of her hands that might have meant anything. But she smiled, and Mr. Thompson observed that she had fine, white, even teeth. Each time he saw her some salient personal feature seemed to claim his attention. To be sure he had seen other girls with good teeth and red lips and other physical charms perhaps as great as Sophie Carr's. But these things had never riveted his attention. There was something about this girl that quickened every fiber of his being. And even while she made him always acutely conscious of her bodily presence, he was a little bit afraid of her. He had swift, discomforting visions of her standing afar beckoning to him, and of himself unable to resist, no matter what the penalty. She stirred up things in his mind that made him blush. He

was conscious of a desire to touch her hand, to kiss her. He found himself totally unable to close the gates of his mind against such thoughts when she was near him. And it was self-generated within him. Sophie Carr was never more than impersonally pleasant to him. Sometimes she was utterly indifferent. Often she said things about his calling that made him wince.

"Tell me," Thompson said abruptly, after a momentary silence, "how it happens that the men who have been here before me left no trace of any — any — well, anything? There have been other missionaries. They had funds. They were stationed here. What did they do? I have been going to ask your father. I daresay you can tell me yourself."

The girl laughed, whether at the question or at his earnestness he could not say.

"They did nothing," she answered in an amused tone. "What could they do? You haven't begun to realize yet what a difficult job you've tackled. The others came here, stayed awhile, threw up their hands and went away. Their idea of doing good seemed to consist of having a ready-made church and a ready-made congregation, and to preach nice little, ready-made religiosities on a Sunday. You can't preach anything to a people who don't understand a word you say, and who are mostly too busy with more pressing affairs to listen if they did understand. And you see for yourself there's no church."

"But what did these fellows do?" he persisted. That had been puzzling him.

"Nothing," she said scornfully, "nothing but sit

around and complain about the loneliness and the coarse food and the discouraging outlook. Then they'd finally go away — go back to where they came from, I suppose."

"The last man," Thompson ventured doubtfully. "The factor at Pachugan told me Mr. Carr assaulted him. That seems rather odd to me, after what I've seen of your father. Was it so?"

"The last missionary wasn't what you'd call a good man, in any sense," Sophie answered frankly. "He was here most of one summer, and toward the last he showed himself up pretty badly. He developed a nasty trick of annoying little native girls. Dad thrashed him properly. Dad took it as a sort of reflection on us. Even the Indians don't approve of that sort of thing. He left in a hurry, after that."

Thompson felt his face burn.

"Things like that made a bad impression," he returned diffidently. "I suppose in all walks of life there are wolves in sheep's clothing. I hope it hasn't prejudiced you against churchmen in general."

"One single incident?" she smiled. "That wouldn't be very logical, would it? No. We're not so intolerant. I don't suppose dad would actually have gone the length of thrashing him, if the preacher hadn't taken a high and mighty tone as a sort of bluff. That particular preacher happened to be a local nuisance. I suppose in a settled, well-organized community, public opinion and convention is a check on such men. They keep within bounds because there's a heavy penalty if they don't. Up here where law and conventions and

so on practically don't exist, men of a certain stamp aren't long in reverting to pure animalism. It's natural enough, I dare say. Dad would be the last one to set himself up as a critic of any one's personal morality. But it isn't very nice, especially for preachers, who come here posing as the representatives of all that is good and pure and holy."

"You get terribly sarcastic at times, Miss Carr," Thompson complained. "A man can preach the Gospel without losing his manhood."

"If he had any clear conception of manhood I don't see how he could devote himself to preaching as a profession," she said composedly. "Of course, it's perhaps an excellent means of livelihood, but rather a parasitic means, don't you think?"

"When Christ came among men He was reviled and despised," Mr. Thompson declared impressively.

"Do you consider yourself the prototype of Christ?" the girl inquired mockingly. "Why, if the man of Galilee could be reincarnated the first thing He would attack would be the official expounders of Christianity, with their creeds and formalisms, their temples and their self-seeking. The Nazarene was a radical. The average preacher is an out-and-out reactionary."

"How do you know?" he challenged boldly. "According to your own account of your life so far, you have never had opportunity to find the truth or falsity of such a sweeping statement. You've always lived —" he looked about the enfolding woods — "how can one know what the world outside of Lake Athabasca is, if one has never been there?"

She laughed.

"One can't know positively," she said. "Not from personal experience. But one can read eagerly, and one can think about what one reads, and one can draw pretty fair conclusions from history, from what wise men, real thinkers, have written about this big world one has never seen. And the official exponents of theology show up rather poorly as helpful social factors, so far as my study of sociology has gone."

"You seem to have a grudge against the cloth," Thompson hazarded a shrewd guess. "I wonder why?"

"I'll tell you why," the girl said — and she laughed a little self-consciously. "My reason tells me it's a silly way to feel. I can never quite consider theology and the preachers from the same dispassionate plane that dad can. There's a foolish sense of personal grievance. Dad had it once, too, but he got over it long ago. I never have. Perhaps you'll understand if I tell you. My mother was a vain, silly, emotional sort of person, it seems, with some wonderful capacity for attracting men. Dad was passionately fond of her. When I was about three years old my foolish mother ran away with a young minister. After living with him about six months, wandering about from place to place, she drowned herself."

Thompson listened to this recital of human frailty in wonder at the calm way in which Sophie Carr could speak to him, a stranger, of a tragedy so intimate. She stopped a second.

"Dad was all broken up about it," she continued.

"He loved my mother with all her weaknesses — and he's a man with a profound knowledge of and tolerance for human weaknesses. I daresay he would have been quite willing to consider the past a blank if she had found out she cared most for him, and had come back. But, as I said, she drowned herself. We lived in the eastern States. It simply unrooted dad. He took me and came away up here and buried himself. Incidentally he buried me too. And I don't want to be buried. I resent being buried. I hope I shall not always be a prisoner in these woods. And I grow more and more resentful against that preacher for giving my father a jolt that made a recluse of him. Don't you see? That one thing has colored my personal attitude toward preachers as a class. I can never meet a minister without thinking of that episode which has kept me here where I never see another white woman, and very seldom a man. It's really a weak spot in me, holding a grudge like that. One wouldn't condemn carpenters as a body because one carpenter botched a house. And still —"

She made the queer little gesture with her hands that he had noticed before. And she smiled quite pleasantly at Mr. Thompson in womanly inconsistency with the attitude she had just been explaining she held toward ministers.

"One gets such silly notions," she remarked. "Just like your idea that you can come here and do good. You can't, you know — not for others — not by your method. It's absurd. One can help others most, I really believe, by helping oneself. I've noticed in read-

ing of the phenomena of human relations that the most pronounced idealists are frequently a sad burden to others."

Mr. Thompson found himself at a loss for instant reply. It was a trifle less direct, more subtle than he liked. It opened hazily paths of speculation he had never explored because generalizations of that sort had never been propounded to him — certainly never by a young woman whose very physical presence disturbed him sadly.

And while he was turning that last sentence over uncomfortably in his mind a hail sounded across the meadow. Sophie stood up and waved the tin bucket she had in her hand. Tommy Ashe came striding toward them. He, too, carried a tin bucket.

"We're going to a blackberry patch down the creek," Sophie answered Thompson's involuntary look of inquiry. "Get a pail and come along."

"I must work," Thompson shook his head.

"Berry-picking's work, if work is what you want," she retorted. "You'd think so by the time you'd picked a hundred quarts or more and preserved them for winter use. But then I suppose *your* winter supply will emanate from some mysterious, beneficent source, without any effort on your part. How fortunate that will be."

She tempered this sally with a laugh, and being presently joined by Tommy Ashe, set off toward the bank of Lone Moose, leaving Mr. Thompson sitting on his log, indulging in some very mixed reflections.

The task he was engaged upon seemed suddenly to

have lost its savor. Whether this arose from a depressing sense of inability to deny the truth of much that Sophie Carr had just said, or from the fact that as he sat there looking after them he found himself envying Tommy Ashe's pleasant intimacy with the girl, he could not say. Indeed, he did not inquire too closely of himself. Some of the conclusions he was latterly arriving at were so radically different from what he was accustomed to accepting that he was a little bit afraid of them.

It took him a considerable time to get back into a proper working frame of mind. The progress of his wooden edifice suffered by that much. When he went trudging home at last, sweaty and tired, with his axe over one shoulder, he was wondering frankly if, after all, it was either wise or necessary to establish a mission at Lone Moose. What good could he or any other man possibly do there? The logical and proper answer to that did not spring as readily to his lips as it would have done at the time of his appointment by the Board of Home Missions.

Along with that he was troubled by a constant recurrence of his thoughts to Sophie Carr. Nor was it a matter of wonder at her bookish knowledge, her astonishing vocabulary, her ability to think and to express her thoughts concisely. He conceded that she was a remarkable young woman in that respect. It was not her intellectual capacity which concerned him greatly, but the sunny aureole of her hair, the smiling curve of her lips, the willowy pliancy of her well-developed body. Just to think of her meant a colorful picture, a vision

that filled him with uneasy restlessness, with vague dissatisfaction, with certain indefinable longings.

He was quite unable to define to himself the purport of these remarkable symptoms.

CHAPTER VII

A SLIP OF THE AXE

Mr. Thompson gradually became aware of a change in the season. The calendar lost a good deal of its significance up there, partly because he had no calendar and partly because one day was so much a duplicate of another that the flitting of time escaped his notice. But he became conscious that the days grew shorter, the nights a shade more cool, and that the atmosphere was taking on that hazy, mellow stillness which makes Indian Summer a period of rare beauty in the North. He took serious stock of elapsed time then, and found to his surprise that it was September the fifteenth.

He had not accomplished much. The walls of his church stood about the level of his head. It grew increasingly difficult for him alone to hoist the logs into place. The door and window spaces were out of square. Without help he did not see how he was going to rectify these small errors and get the roof on. Even after it should be roofed, the cracks chinked and daubed with mud, the doors and windows in place — what then?

He would still lack hearers for the message which he daily grew a little more doubtful of his ability to deliver. A native streak of stubbornness kept him studying the language along with his daily tussle with

the axe and saw. But the rate of his progress was such that he pessimistically calculated that it would take him at least two years before he could preach with any degree of understanding in the Athabascan tongue.

So far he had never gone the length of candidly asking himself whether by then it would be a task he could put his heart into, if he were even fitted for such a work, or if it were a useful and worthy task if he were gifted with a fitness for it. He had been taught that preaching the gospel was a divinely appointed function. He had not questioned that. But he had now a lively sense of difficulties hitherto unreckoned, and an ill-stifled doubt of the good that might accrue. His blank ignorance of the salient points of human contact, of why men work and play, why they love and fight and marry and bend all their energies along certain given lines until they grow old and gray and in the end cease to be, only served to bewilder him. His association with Tommy Ashe and with Carr and Carr's daughter — especially with Carr's daughter — further accentuated the questioning uncertainty of his mind.

But that was all — merely an uncertainty which he tried to dissipate by prayer and stern repression of smoldering doubts. At the same time while he decried and resented their outspoken valuation of material considerations he found himself constantly subject to those material factors of daily living.

The first of these was food. When Mr. Thompson outfitted himself for that spiritual invasion of Lone Moose he brought in four months' supplies. He discovered now that his supply of certain articles was not

so adequate as he had been told it would be. Also he had learned from Carr and Lachlan that if a man wintered at Lone Moose it was well to bring in a winter's grub before the freeze-up — the canoe being a far easier mode of transport than a dog-team and sled.

So Thompson stopped his building activities long enough to make a trip to Pachugan. He got Lachlan's oldest son to go with him. His quarterly salary was due, and he had a rather reluctant report of his work to make. With the money he would be able to replenish his stock of sugar and tea and dried fruit and flour. He decided too that he would have to buy a gun and learn to use it as the source of his meat supply.

His sublime confidence in the organization which had sent him there suffered a decided shock when he reached Fort Pachugan, and found no remittance awaiting him. There was a letter from the Board secretary breathing exhortations which sounded rather hollow in conjunction with the absence of funds. Mr. Thompson, for the first time in his career, found himself badly in need of money, irritated beyond measure by its lack, painfully cognizant of its value. But he was too diffident to suggest a credit on the strength of the cheque which, upon reflection, he decided was merely delayed in the more or less uncertain mails. He could make shift with what he had for another month. Nor did he mention this slight difficulty to MacLeod.

That gentleman had greeted him heartily enough.

"Man, but ye look as if the country agreed wi' you," he observed, after an appraising glance. "How goes the good work at Lone Moose?"

"There are difficulties," Thompson responded with an unintentional touch of ambiguity. "But I daresay I'll manage in time to overcome them."

He discovered in himself a disinclination to talk about his labors in that field.

MacLeod smiled and forbore to press the subject. There were sundry parcels for Sam Carr, a letter or two, and a varied assortment of magazines. Thompson took these, after tarrying overnight at the post, and started home, refusing MacLeod's cordial invitation to stay over a day or two. He would be back again when the next mail was due, a matter of four or five weeks. And late that same evening, by dint of a favorable breeze that kept the canoe flying, and some hard pulling up Lone Moose Creek, Thompson and the breed boy reached home.

Young Lachlan went off to his cabin. Mr. Thompson conscientiously lugged the assortment of parcels and magazines over to Sam Carr's house, duly delivered the three letters to Carr himself, and — for reasons that he could not define as anything but an unwarrantable access of shyness — declining the first invitation he had ever received to break bread at Carr's table, hurried back to his own primitive quarters. Perhaps the fact that Sophie Carr, curled up in a big chair, smiled at him in a way that made his pulses quicken had something to do with his hasty retreat. He was wary of the impulses and emotions she never failed to stir in him when he was near her. There were times when he suspected that she was aware of this power — which in his naïve conception of women he believed

almost uncanny in her — and that she amused herself by exercising it upon him. And he resented that.

So he did not stay long enough to observe Carr lay two of his letters on the table after a brief glance, and sit looking fixedly at the third, which by the length of envelope and thickness of enclosure might conceivably have contained some document of a legal or official nature.

Carr looked at this letter a long time before he tore it open. He took a still longer time to peruse its contents. He sat for several minutes thereafter turning the sheets over and over in his lean fingers, until in fact he became aware that his daughter's eyes were fixed on him with a lively curiosity in their gray depths.

"What is it, Dad?" she asked, as he tucked envelope and foolscap pages into the inside pocket of his coat.

"Oh, nothing much," he said shortly.

But he leaned back in his chair and immediately became absorbed in thought that accentuated the multitude of fine lines about his eyes and drew his lips together in a narrow line. Sophie sat regarding him with a look of wonder.

This trifling incident, naturally, did not come under the notice of Mr. Thompson. Conceivably he would not have noticed had he been present, nor have been in any degree interested.

He was, as a matter of fact, fully occupied at that precise moment with the painful and disagreeable consequences of attempting to split kindling by lantern light. To be specific the axe had glanced and cut a deep gash in one side of his foot.

At about the particular moment in which Sam Carr leaned back in his chair and fell into that brown study of a matter that was to have a far-reaching effect, Mr. Thompson was seated on his haunches on his cabin floor, his hands stained with blood and a considerable trail of red marking his progress from woodpile to cabin. His face was white, and his hands rather shaky by the time he finished binding up the wound. The cut stung and burned. When he essayed to move he found himself quite effectually crippled.

For the first time in his twenty-five years of carefully directed existence Mr. Thompson swore a loud, round, Anglo-Saxon oath. Whether this relieved his pent-up feelings or not he appeared to suffer no remorse for the burst of profanity. Instead, he rose and limped painfully about the building of a fire and the preparation of his supper.

CHAPTER VIII

—AND THE FRUITS THEREOF

Mr. Thompson slept fitfully that night. A hard day's paddling had left him tired and sleepy, but the swarm of pain-devils in his slashed foot destroyed his rest. When he got up at daylight and examined the wound again he found himself afflicted with a badly swollen foot and ankle, and a steady dull ache that extended upward past the knee. He was next to helpless since every movement produced the most acute sort of pain — sufficiently so that when he had made shift to get some breakfast he could scarcely eat. In the course of his experiments in self-aid he discovered that to lie flat on his back with the slashed foot raised higher than his body gave a measure of ease. So he adopted this position and stoically set out to endure the hurt. He lay in that position the better part of the day — until, in fact, four in the afternoon brought Sam Carr, shotgun in hand, to his door.

Carr had seldom been in the cabin. This evening, for some reason, he put his head in the door, and whistled softly at sight of Thompson's bandaged foot cocked up on a folded overcoat.

"Well, well," he said, standing his gun against the door casing and coming in. "What have you done to yourself now?"

"Oh, I cut my foot with the axe last night, worse luck," Thompson responded petulantly.

"Bad?" Carr inquired.

"Bad enough."

"Let me see it," Carr suggested. "It's a long way to a sawbones, and Providence never seems quite able to cope with germs of infection. Have you any sort of antiseptic dressing on it?"

Thompson shook his head. He would not confess that the pain and swelling had caused him certain misgivings, brought to his mind uneasily a good deal that he had read and heard of blood-poisoning from cuts and scratches. He was secretly glad to let Carr undo the rude bandage and examine the wound. A man who had spent fifteen years in the wilderness must have had to cope with similar cases.

"You did give yourself a nasty nick and no mistake," Carr observed. "You won't walk on that foot comfortably for two or three weeks. Just grazed a bone. No carbolic, no peroxide, or anything like that, I suppose?"

Thompson shook his head. He had not reckoned on cuts and bruises. Carr put back the wrapping and sat whittling shavings of tobacco off a brown plug, while Thompson got up, hopped on one foot across to the stove and began to lay a fire. He had eaten nothing since morning, and was correspondingly hungry. In addition, a certain unministerial pride stirred him to action. He was ashamed to lie supinely enduring, to seem helpless before another man's eyes. But the effort showed in his face.

Carr lit his pipe and watched silently. His gaze took in every detail of the cabin's interior, of Thompson's painful movements, of the poorly cooked remains of breakfast that he was warming up.

"You'll put that foot in a bad way if you try to use it much," he said at last. "The best thing you can do is to come home with me and lie around till you can walk again. I've got stuff to dress it properly. Think you can hobble across the clearing if I make you a temporary crutch?"

Thompson at first declined to be such a source of trouble. He was grateful enough, but reluctant. Carr, however, went about it in a way that permitted nothing short of a boorish refusal, and presently Mr. Thompson found himself, with a crutch made of a forked willow, crossing the meadow to Sam Carr's house.

His instincts had more or less subconsciously warned him that it would not be well for his peace of mind or the good of his soul to be in intimate daily contact with Sophie Carr. But his general inability to cope with emergencies — which was patent enough to a practical man if not wholly so to himself — culminating in this misadventure with a sharp axe, had brought about that very circumstance.

He had not looked for such a kindly office on the part of Sam Carr. That individual's caustic utterances and critical attitude toward theology had not forewarned Thompson that sympathy and kindliness were fundamental attributes with Sam Carr. If he had an acid tongue his heart was tender enough. But Carr was

no sentimentalist. When he had bestowed Thompson in a comfortable room and painstakingly dressed the injured foot he left his patient much to his own devices — and to the ministrations of his daughter.

As a consequence, while the wound in his foot healed rapidly, Mr. Thompson suffered a more grievous injury to his heart. Sophie Carr affected him much as strong drink affects men with weak heads. The more he saw of her the more he desired to see, to feast his eyes on her loveliness — and invariably, when alone, to berate himself for such a weakness. He had never dreamed that a man could feel that way about a woman. He did not see why he, of all men, should succumb to the fascination of a girl like Sophie Carr.

But the emotion was undeniable. Perhaps Sophie would have been surprised if she could have known the amount of repression Mr. Thompson gradually became compelled to practice when she was with him.

That was frequently enough. They were all good to him. From Carr's Indian woman — who could, he now learned, speak passable English — down to the sloe-eyed youngest Carr of mixed blood, they accepted him as one of themselves. However, it happened to be Sophie who waited on him most, who impishly took the greatest liberties with him, who was never averse to an argument on any subject Thompson cared to touch. He had never supposed there was a normal being with views on religion and economics, upon any manifestation of human problems, with views so contrary to his own. The maddening part of it was her ability to cite facts and authorities whose existence he was not aware

of, to confute him with logic and compel him to admit that he did not know, that much of what he asserted so emphatically was based on mere belief rather than demonstrable fact or rational processes of arriving at a conclusion. Sometimes both Sam Carr and Tommy Ashe were present at these oral tilts, sitting back in silent amusement at Mr. Thompson's intellectual floundering.

A clean cut in the flesh of a healthy man heals quickly. In two weeks Thompson could put his full weight on the injured member without pain or any tendency to reopening the wound. Whereupon he repaired to his cabin again, in a state of mind that was very disturbing. Without accepting any of the Carr dictums upon theology and theological activities, he was fast growing doubtful of his fitness for the job of herding other people into the fold. He found himself with a growing disinclination for such a task as his life work. Since that was the only thing he had any aptitude for or training in, when he thought of cutting loose and facing the world at large without the least idea of what he should do or how he should do it, he perceived himself in a good deal of a dilemma.

He was growing sure of one thing. Over and above the good of his soul and other people's souls, a man must eat — to put it baldly. He should earn his keep. He must indeed calculate upon provision for two. Mr. Thompson had made the common mistake of believing himself self-sufficient, and Sophie Carr had unwittingly taught him that a male celibate was an anomaly in nature's reckoning. He had thought himself immune

from the ordinary passions of humanity. The strangest part of it was a saddened gladness that he was not. Somehow, he did not want to be a spiritual superman. He would rather love and struggle and suffer than stand aloof, thanking God that he was not, like the Pharisees, as other men. Sitting moodily by his rusty stove he confessed to himself that a man who would gladly give up his hopes of eternal salvation for the privilege of folding Sophie Carr close in his arms had no business in the ministry — unless he simply wanted to hold down an easy, salaried job.

Whatever other sorts of a fool he might have been Thompson was no hypocrite. He had never consciously looked upon the ministry as a man looks upon a business career — a succession of steps to success, to an assured social and financial position. Yet when he turned the searchlight of analysis upon his motives he could not help seeing that this was the very thing he had unwittingly been doing — that he had expected and hoped for his progress through missionary work and small churches eventually to bestow upon him a call to a wider field — a call which Sam Carr had callously suggested meant neither more nor less than a bigger church, a wider social circle, a bigger salary. And Thompson could see that he had been looking forward to these things as a just reward, and he could see too how the material benefits in them were the lure. He had been coached and primed for that. His inclination had been sedulously directed into that channel. His enthusiasm had been the enthusiasm of one who seeks to serve and feels wholly competent.

But he doubted both his fitness and his inclination now. He said to himself that when a man loses heart in his work he should abandon that work. He tried to muster up a resentful feeling against Sophie Carr for the emotional havoc she had wrought, and the best he could do was a despairing pang of loneliness. He wanted her. Above all he wanted her. And she was a rank infidel — a crass materialist — an intellectual Circe. Why, in the name of God, he asked himself passionately, must *he* lose his heart so fully to a woman with whom he could have nothing more in common save the common factor that she was a woman and he a man.

Mr. Thompson had not as yet discovered what a highly important factor that last was.

He managed to get a partial insight into that some three days later, and the vision was vouchsafed him in a simple and natural manner, although to him at the time it seemed the most wonderful and unaccountable thing in the world.

CHAPTER IX

UNIVERSAL ATTRIBUTES

Afterward Thompson could never quite determine what prompted him to follow Sophie Carr when he saw her go down toward the creek bank. He was on his way to Carr's house, driven thither by pure pressure of loneliness, born of three days' solitary communion within the limits of his own shack. He wanted to hear a human voice again. And it was a vagrant, unaccountable impulse that sent him after Sophie instead of directing him straight to Carr's living room, where her father would probably be sitting, pipe in mouth, book in hand.

He hurried with long strides after Sophie. She dipped below the sloping bank before he came up, and when he came noiselessly down to the grassy bank she stood leaning against a tree, gazing at the sluggish flow of Lone Moose.

He had seen her in moods that varied from feminine pettishness to the teasingly mischievous. But he had never seen her in quite the same pitch of spirits that caught his attention as soon as he reached her side.

There was something bubbling within her, some repressed excitement that kindled a glow in her gray eyes, kept a curiously happy smile playing about her lips.

And that magnetic something that drew the heart out of Thompson, afflicting him with a maddening surge of impulses, had never functioned so strongly.

"What is it?" he asked abruptly. "You seem — you look —"

He stopped short. It was not what he meant to say. He tried to avoid the intimately personal when he was with her. He knew the danger of those sweet familiarities — to himself. But he had blurted out the question before he was aware. He was standing so close to her that a little whirling breeze blew a strand of her yellow hair across his face. That tenuous contact made him quiver, gave him a queer intoxicating thrill.

"Does it show so plainly as that?" she smiled. "It's a secret. A really wonderful secret. I'm just bursting to talk about it, but I mustn't. Talking might break the spell. Do you — along with your other naïve beliefs — believe in spells, Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes," he answered simply. "In yours."

Her eyes danced. She laughed softly, deep in her throat, like a meadow lark in spring.

"That's the first time I ever knew you to indulge in irony," she said.

"It isn't irony," he answered moodily. "It's the honest truth."

"Poor man," she said gaily. "I'd be flattered to death to think a simple backwoods maiden could make such a profound impression on a young man from the city — but it isn't so."

She turned her head sidewise, like a saucy bird, regarding him with mock gravity, a mischievous sparkle

in her eyes. Mr. Thompson had a long arm and he stood close to her, tantalizingly close. She was smiling. Her lips parted redly over white, even teeth, and as Thompson bent that moody somber gaze on her, her breath seemed to come suddenly a little faster, making her round breast flutter — and a faint tinge of pink stole up to color the soft whiteness of her neck, up into the smooth round of her cheeks.

Thompson's arm closed about her, his lips grazed her cheek as she twisted her head to evade him. That minor show of resistance stirred all the primitive instincts that active or dormant lurk in every strong man. He twisted her head roughly, and as naturally as water flows down hill their lips met. He felt the girl's body nestle with a little tremor closer to his, felt with an odd exaltation the quick hammer of her heart against his breast. He held her tight, and her face slowly drew away from him, and turned shyly against his shoulder.

"It is so, and you know it's so," he whispered hoarsely. "Sophie, I wish —"

She freed herself from his embrace with a sudden twist. Her breath went out in a little gasp. She looked over her shoulder once, and up at Thompson, and a wave of red swept up over her fresh young face and dyed it to the roots of her sunny hair. For a brief instant her hand lingered in Thompson's, bestowing a quick and tender pressure. Then she was gone up the bank with a bound like a startled deer.

Thompson turned. Ten yards out in the stream Tommy Ashe's red canoe drifted, and Tommy sat in the stern, his wet paddle poised as if he had halted it

midway of a stroke, his body bent forward, tense as that of a beast crouched to spring.

The bow of the canoe grounded. Ashe laid down his paddle, stepped forward and ashore, hauling the craft's nose high with one hand. His gaze never left Thompson's face. He came slowly up, his round, boyish countenance white and hard and ugly, his eyes smoldering.

Thompson felt his own face hardening into the same ugly lines. He felt himself threatened. Without being fully aware of his act he had dropped into a belligerent pose, head and shoulders thrust forward, one foot drawn back, hands clenched. This was purely instinctive. That Tommy Ashe had seen him kiss Sophie Carr and was advancing upon him in jealous fury did not occur to Thompson at all.

"You beggar," Ashe gritted, "is it part of your system of saving souls to kiss a girl as if —"

The quality of his tone would have stung a less sensitive man. With Sophie Carr's lip-pressure fresh and warm upon his own Thompson was in that exalted mood wherein a man is like an open powder keg. And Tommy Ashe had supplied the spark. A most unchristian flash of anger shot through him. His reply was an earnest, if ill-directed blow. This Tommy dodged by the simplest expedient of twisting his head sidewise without moving his body, and launched at the same time a return jab which neatly smacked against Thompson's jaw.

Tommy Ashe was wonderfully quick on his feet and a powerful man to boot. Moreover he had a certain dexterity with his fists. He was in deadly earnest, as

a man is when matters of sex lead him to a personal clash. But he found pitted against him a man equally powerful, a man whose extra reach and weight offset the advantage in skill, a man who gave and took blows with silent ferocity.

Thompson, in all his carefully ordered life, had never fought. He fought now as if his life depended upon it. Each blow he gave and took brought to the surface a furious determination. He was not conscious of real pain, although he knew that his lips were cut and bleeding, that his cheeks were bruised and cut where Tommy Ashe's hard-knuckled fists landed with impressive force, that his heart pounded sickeningly against his ribs, and that every breath was a rasping gasp. Nor was he conscious of pity when he saw that Tommy Ashe was in no better case. It seemed fit and proper that they should struggle like that. There was a strange sort of pleasure in it. It seemed natural, as natural an act as he had ever performed. The shock of his clenched fist driven with all his force against the other man's body thrilled him, gave him a curious satisfaction. And that satisfaction took on a keener edge when Ashe clinched and they fell to the earth a struggling, squirming heap — for Thompson felt a tremendous power in his arms, in those arms covered with flat elastic bands of muscle hardened by weeks of axe-slinging, of heaving on heavy logs. He wrapped his arms about Ashe and tried to crush him.

One trial of that fierce grip enlightened Tommy Ashe. He broke loose from Thompson by a trick known to every man who has ever wrestled, and clawed away to

his feet. Thereafter he kept clear of grips. Quick, with some skill at boxing, he could get home two blows to Thompson's one. But he could not down his man. Nor could Thompson. They struck and parried, circling and dodging, till their lungs were on fire, and neither had strength enough left to strike a telling blow.

The rage had gone out of them by then. It had become a dogged struggle for mastery. And failing that, there came a moment when they staggered apart and stood glaring at each other, choking for breath. As they stood, Tommy Ashe spoke first.

"You're a tough bird — for a parson."

He gasped the words.

With the dying out of that senseless fury a peculiar feeling of elation came to Thompson, as if he had proved himself upon a doubtful matter. He was ready to go on. But why? That question urged itself upon him. He recalled that he had struck the first blow.

"I think — I started this, didn't I?" he said. "I'm willing to finish it, if you want to — but isn't it — isn't it rather foolish?"

"No end foolish. Don't think we'd ever finish," Ashe said with a gleam of his old humor. "Let's call it a draw. I feel a bit ashamed of myself by now."

Somewhere, sometime, Mr. Thompson had heard that men who fought shook hands when the struggle was ended — a little ceremony that served to restore the *status quo*. He had not the least rancor against Tommy Ashe. It had all seeped away in the blind fury of that clash. He thrust out a hand upon which the knuckles were cut and bloody. And the man upon

whose countenance he had bruised those knuckles took it with a wry self-conscious smile.

Then they drew a little apart and squatted on the bank of the creek to lave their battered faces in the cold water.

For a period of possibly five minutes they sat dabbling water-soaked handkerchiefs upon their faces. The blood ceased to ooze from Thompson's nostrils. Tommy Ashe looked over at his late antagonist and remarked casually.

"We're a pair of capital idiots, eh, Thompson?"

Mr. Thompson tried to smile. But his countenance was swelling rapidly and was in no condition for smiling. He mustered up a grimace, nodding assent.

"I hope Sophie didn't see us making such asses of ourselves," Tommy continued ruefully.

"I hardly think she would," Thompson returned. "It couldn't have been the sort of spectacle a woman would care to watch."

"You never can tell about a woman," Ashe observed thoughtfully. "Nor," he added, "a man. I could never have imagined myself going off half-cocked like that. I suppose the primitive brute in us is never really far from the surface. Especially in this country. There's something," he looked up at the surrounding depths of forest, down along the dusky channel of Lone Moose, curving away among the spruce, "there's something about this infernal solitude that brings out the savage. I've noticed it in little things. We're loosed, in a way, from all restraint, except what we put upon ourselves. Funny world, eh? You couldn't

imagine two chaps like us mauling each other like a pair of bruisers in Mrs. Grundy's drawing-room, could you? Over a girl — oh, well, it'll be all the same a hundred years from now."

There was nothing apologetic in either Tommy's tone or words. Thompson understood. Tommy Ashe was thinking out loud, that was all. And presently, after another silent interval, he stood up.

"I think I'll be getting back to my own diggings," he said. "So long, old man."

He nodded, pushed off his canoe and stepped aboard. In a minute he was gone around the bend, driving the red canoe with slow, deliberate strokes.

Mr. Thompson gave over musing upon Tommy Ashe and Tommy's words and attitude, and began to take stock of himself. It seemed to him that Tommy Ashe felt ashamed of himself, whereas by all the precepts of his earlier life and the code he had assimilated during that formative period he, Wesley Thompson, was the one who should suffer a sense of shame. And he felt no shame. On the contrary he experienced nothing more than an astonishing feeling of exhilaration. Why, he could not determine. It was un-Christian, undignified, brutal, to give and take blows, to feel that vicious determination to smash another man with his bare fists, to know the unholy joy of getting a blow home with all the weight of his body behind it. Mr. Thompson was a trifle dazed, a trifle uncertain. His face was puffed out of its natural contours, and very tender in spots to touch. He knew that he must be a sight. There was a grievous stiffness creeping over

his arms and shoulders, an ache in his ribs, as his heated body began to cool. But he was not sorry for anything. He experienced no regrets. Only a heady feeling that for once in his life he had met an emergency and had been equal to the demand.

Perhaps the sweet memory of Sophie Carr's warm lips on his had something to do with this.

At any rate he rose after a little and followed the creek bank to a point well down stream, whence he crossed through the fringe of timber to his cabin.

CHAPTER X

THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN

Between the queer mixture of emotions which beset him and the discomfort of his bruised face and overstrained body Thompson turned and twisted, and sleep withheld its restful oblivion until far in the night. As a consequence he slept late. Dawn had grown old before he wakened.

When he opened his cabin door he was confronted by the dourest aspect of the north that he had yet seen. The sky was banked full of slate-gray clouds scudding low before a northeast wind that droned its melancholy song in the swaying spruce tops, a song older than the sorrows of men, the essence of all things forlorn in its minor cadences. A gray, clammy day, tinged with the chill breath of coming snow. Thompson missed the sun that had cheered and warmed those hushed solitudes. Just to look at that dull sky and to hear the wind that was fast stripping the last sere leaves from willow and maple and birch, and to feel that indefinable touch of harshness, the first frigid fingerings of the frost-gods in the air, gave him a swift touch of depression. He shivered a little. Turning to his wood box he hastened to build a fire in the stove.

He stoked that rusty firebox until by the time he had cooked and eaten breakfast it was glowing red. When he sat with his feet cocked up on the stove front and gave himself up to the sober business of thought, it seemed to him that he was passing a portentous milestone. To his unsophisticated mind the simple fact that Sophie Carr had permitted him to kiss her, that for a moment her head with its fluffy aureole of yellow hair had rested willingly upon his shoulder, created a bond between them, an understanding, a tentative promise, a cleaving together that could have but one conclusion. He found himself reflecting upon that — to him — most natural conclusion with a peculiar mixture of gladness and doubt. For even in his exaltation he could not visualize Sophie Carr as an ideal minister's helpmate. He simply could not. He could hear too plainly the scorn of her tone as she spoke of " parasitical parsons ", of " unthinking acceptance of priestly myths ", of the Church, his Church, as " an organization essentially materialistic in its aims and activities ", and many more such phrases which were new and startling to Thompson, even if they had been current among radical thinkers long enough to become incorporated in a great deal that has been written upon philosophy and theology.

Sophie didn't believe in his God, nor his work; he stopped short of asking if he himself any longer had full and implicit belief in these things, or if he had simply accepted them without question as he had accepted so many other things in his brief career. But she believed in *him* and cared for him. He took that

for granted too. And love covers a multitude of sins. He had often had occasion to discourse upon various sorts of love — fatherly love and brotherly love and maternal affection and so on. But this flare of passionate tenderness focussing upon one slender bit of a girl was something he could not quite fathom. He would have contradicted with swift anger any suggestion that perhaps it was merely wise old Nature's ancient method efficiently at work for an appointed end. He had been so thoroughly grounded in the convention of decrying physical impulses, of putting everything upon a pure and spiritual plane, that in this first emotional crisis of his life he could no more help dodging first principles than a spaniel pup can help swimming when he is first tossed into deep water.

Still — he was not a fool. He knew that his concern was not for Sophie Carr's immortal soul, nor for the beauty and sweetness of her spirit, when he was near her, when he touched her hand, nor even in that supreme moment when he crushed her close to his unquiet heart and pressed that hot kiss on her lips. It was the sheer flesh and blood womanliness of her that made his heart beat faster, the sweet curve of her lips, the willowy grace of her body, the odd little gestures of her hands, the melody of her voice and the gray pools of her eyes, eyes full of queer gleams and curious twinkles — all these things were indescribably beautiful to him. He loved her — just the girl herself. He wanted her, craved her presence; not the pleasant memory of her, but the forthright physical nearness of her he desired with an intensity that was like a fever.

Just the excitement of feeling — as according to his lights he had a right to feel — that they stood pledged, made it hard for him to get down to fundamentals and consider rationally the question of marriage, of their future, of how his appointed work could be made to dovetail with the union of two such diverse personalities as himself and Sophie Carr.

A hodge podge of this sort was turning over in his mind as he sat there, now and then absently feeling the dusky puffiness under one eye and the tender spot on the bridge of his nose where Tommy Ashe's hard knuckles had peeled away the skin. He still had a most un-Christian satisfaction in the belief that he had given as good as he had got. He was not ashamed of having fought. He would fight again, any time, anywhere, for Sophie Carr. He did not ask himself whether the combative instinct once aroused might not function for lesser cause.

He came out of this reverie at the faint rustle of footsteps beyond his door — which was open because of the hot fire he had built.

He did not suspect that the source of those footsteps might be Sophie Carr until she stood unmistakably framed in the doorway. He rose to his feet with a glad cry of welcome, albeit haltingly articulated. He was suddenly reluctant to face her with the marks of conflict upon his face.

"May I come in?" she asked coolly — and suited her action to the request before he made reply.

She sat down on a box just within the door and looked soberly at him, scanning his face. Her hands

lay quietly in her lap and she did not seem to see Thompson's involuntarily extended arms. There was about her none of the glowing witchery of yesterday. She lifted to him a face thoughtful, even a little sad. And Thompson's hands fell, his heart keeping them company. It was as if the somberness of those wind-swept woods had crept into his cabin. It stilled the rush of words that quivered on his lips. Sophie, indeed, found utterance first.

"I'm sorry that you and Tommy fought," she said constrainedly. "I didn't know until this morning. It was cowardly of me to run away. But it was foolish to fight. It didn't occur to me that you two would. I suppose you wonder what brought me here. I was worried for fear you had been hurt. I saw Tommy, but he wouldn't talk."

"I daresay I'm not a pretty object to look at," Thompson admitted. "But I'm really not much the worse."

"No. I can see that," she said. "Tommy is very quick and very strong — I was a little afraid."

The contrition, the hint of pity in her voice stirred up the queer personal pride he had lately acquired.

"I don't suppose Ashe has any monopoly of strength and quickness," he remarked. "That — but there, I don't want to talk about that."

He came over close beside her and looked down with all his troubled heart in his clear blue eyes — so that the girl turned her gaze away and her fingers wove nervously together.

"My dear," the unaccustomed phrase broke abruptly,

with a fierce tenderness, from his lips. "I love you — which I think you know without my saying so. I want you. Will you marry me? I —"

Sophie warded off the impetuous outstretching of his arms and sprang to her feet, facing him with all the delicate color gone out of her cheeks, a sudden heave to her breast. She shook her head. "No," she said. "I won't penalize myself to that extent — nor you. I won't bind myself by any such promise. I won't even admit that I might."

He caught her by the shoulders and shook her roughly.

"Yesterday," he said hoarsely, "you let me kiss you — your lips burned me — you rested your head against me as if it belonged there. What sort of a woman are you? Sophie! Sophie!"

"I know," she returned. "But yesterday was yesterday. This is another day. Yesterday — oh, you wouldn't understand if I told you. Yesterday I was bursting with happiness, like a bird in the spring. I like you, big man with the freckled face. You came down here and stood beside me and smiled at me. And — and that's all — a minute's madness. We can't marry on *that*. I can't. *I won't*."

His fingers tightened on the rounded arms. He shook her again with a restrained savagery. If he hurt her she did not flinch, nor did her gray eyes, cloudy now and wistful, waver before the passionate fire in his.

"Sophie," he went on, "you don't know what this means to me. Don't you care a little?"

"Yes," she answered slowly. "Perhaps more than

a little. I'm made that way, I suppose. It isn't hard for me to love. But one doesn't —"

"Then why," he demanded, "why refuse to give me a hope? Why, if you care in the least, is there no chance for me? It isn't just a sudden fancy. I've been feeling it grow and struggling to repress it, ever since I first saw you. You say you care — yet you won't even think of marrying me. I can't understand that at all. Why?"

"Do you want to know? Can't you see good grounds why we two, of all people, should *not* marry?" she asked evenly. "Can you see anything to make it desirable except a — a welling up of natural passion? Don't hold my arms so tight. You hurt."

He released his unthinking grip and stepped back a pace, his expression one of hurt bewilderment at the paradox of Sophie's admission and refusal.

"We're at opposite poles in everything," she went on. "I don't believe in the things you believe in. I don't see life with your vision at all. I never shall. We'd be in a continual clash. I like you but I couldn't possibly live with you — you couldn't live with me. I rebel at the future I can see for us. Apart from yourself, the things you'd want to share with me I despise. If I had to live in an atmosphere of sermons and shams, of ministerial sanctimoniousness and material striving for a bigger church and a bigger salary, I'd suffocate — I'd hate myself — and in the end I'd hate you too."

A little note of scorn crept into her voice, and she stopped. When she spoke again her tone had changed, deepened into uncertainty, freighted with wistfulness.

"I'm not good — not in your sense of the word," she said. "I don't even want to be. It would take all the joy out of living. I want to sing and dance and be vibrantly alive. I want to see far countries and big cities, to go about among people whose outlook isn't bounded by a forest and a lake shore, nor by the things you set store by. And I'll be a discontented pendulum until I do.

"Why," she burst out passionately, "I'd be the biggest little fool on earth to marry you just because — just because I like you, because you kissed me and for a minute made me feel that life could be bounded by you and kisses. You're only the second possible man I've ever seen. You and Tommy Ashe. And before you came I could easily have persuaded myself that I loved Tommy."

"Now you think perhaps you love me, but that you might perhaps care in the same way for the next attractive man who comes along? Is that it?" Thompson asked with a touch of bitterness.

"I might *think* so — how can one tell?" she sighed. "But I'm very sure my impulses will never plunge me into anything headlong, as you would have me plunge. Don't you see," she made an impatient gesture, "we're just like a couple of fledgling birds trying our wings. And you want to proceed on the assumption that we're equal to anything, sure of everything. I *know* I'm not. You —"

She made again that quick, expressive gesture with her hands. Something about it made Thompson suddenly feel hopeless and forlorn, the airy castles reared

overnight out of the stuff of dreams a tumbled heap about him. He sat down on one of the rude chairs, and turned his face to look out the window, a lump slowly gathering in his throat.

"All right," he said. "Good-by."

If his tone was harsh and curt he could not help that. It was all he could say and the only possible fashion of saying it. He wanted to cry aloud his pain, the yearning ache that filled him, and he could not, would not — no more than he would have whined under pure physical hurt. But when he heard the faint rustle of her cotton dress and her step outside he put his face on his hands and took his breath with a shuddering sigh.

At that, he was mistaken. Sophie had not gone. There was the quick, light pad of her feet on the floor, her soft warm hands closed suddenly about his neck, and he looked up into eyes bright and wet. Her face dropped to a level with his own.

"I'm so sorry, big man," she whispered, in a small, choked voice. "It hurts me too."

He felt the warm moist touch of her lips on his cheek, the faint exhalation of her breath, and while his arms reached swiftly, instinctively to grasp and hold her close, she was gone. And this time she did not come back.

CHAPTER XI

A MAN'S JOB FOR A MINISTER

Having thus received a sad jolt through the medium of his affections, Mr. Thompson, like countless numbers of human beings before him, set about gathering himself together. He did a tremendous lot of thinking about things in general, about himself and Sophie Carr in particular. Moping in that isolated cabin his mind took on a sort of abnormal activity. He could not even stop thinking when he wanted to stop. He would lie awake in the silent darkness long after he should have been asleep, going over his narrow and uneventful existence, the unwelcome and anguished present, the future that was nothing but a series of blank pages which he had yet to turn in God only knew what bitterness and sorrow. That was the way he gloomily put it to himself. He had still to learn what an adaptable, resilient organism man is. This, his first tentative brush with life, with the realities of pain and passion, had left him exceedingly cast down, more than a little inclined to pessimism.

He experienced gusts of unreasoning anger at Sophie Carr, forgetting, as a man wounded in his egotism and

disappointed in his first passionate yearning for a mate is likely to forget, that he had brought it on himself, that Sophie had not encouraged him, nor lured him to his undoing, nor given him aught to nourish the illusion that she was his for the asking.

Sometimes he would have a vivid flash of jealousy when he thought about her and Tommy Ashe, when he recalled her admissions. And he would soften from that mood, twisting his lips wryly, when he remembered the pitying tenderness of her good-by.

He could not in the least understand the girl nor her motives, any more than he could understand the transformation that he felt vaguely was taking place in himself. She was too wise for her years and her experience. There was a stinging truth in some of the things she said. And it was his fault, not hers, that they were unpalatable truths. What did a man like himself have to offer a girl like her? Nothing. She had his measure in everything but sheer brute strength, most of all in the stoutness of her resolution. For Mr. Thompson, pondering soberly, realized that if he gave free play to the feelings Sophie Carr had stirred up in him, there was no folly he was not capable of committing. He, whose official creed it was to expound self-denial, would have followed his impulses blindly. He would have married out of hand.

And after that, what?

He could not see clearly, when he tried to see. He was no longer filled with the sublime faith that a beneficent Providence kept watch and ward over him, and all men. He was in fact now almost of the opinion that both

sparrows and preachers might fall and the Great Intelligence remain unperturbed. It seemed necessary that a man should do more than have faith. He must imperatively make some conscious, intelligent effort on his own behalf. He was especially of this opinion since the Board of Home Missions had overlooked the matter of forwarding his quarterly salary on time. The faith that moveth mountains was powerless to conjure flour and sugar and tea out of those dusky woods and silent waterways — at least not without a canoe and labor and a certain requisite medium of exchange.

No, he did not blame Sophie Carr for refusing to allow her judgment to be fogged with sentiment. He only marvelled that she could do it where he had failed. He could not blame her — not if his speech and activities since he came to Lone Moose were the measure of his possible achievement.

He was taking grim, unsparing stock of himself, of what he had, of what he had accomplished altogether, by this time. It was not much. It was not even promising. A theological education, which, compared to the sort of culture Sam Carr and his daughter had managed to acquire, seemed rather inadequate and one-sided. They knew more about the principles he was supposed to teach than he knew himself. And their knowledge extended to fields where he could not follow. When he compared himself with Tommy Ashe — well, Tommy was an Oxford man, and although Oxford had not indelibly stamped him, still it had left its mark.

These people had covered all his ground — and they had gone exploring further in fields of general knowl-

edge while he sat gazing smugly at his own reflection in a theological mirror. Upon that score certainly the count was badly against him.

As for his worldly possessions, when Mr. Thompson sardonically considered them as a means of supporting a wife he was forced to admit that the provision would be intolerably meager. His prospects included a salary that barely sufficed for one. It was apparent, he concluded, that the Board of Home Missions, like the Army and Navy, calculated its rank and file to remain in single blessedness and subsist frugally to boot.

As to his late accomplishments in the field of labor, Mr. Thompson looked out of his cabin door to where he could see dimly through the trees the uncompleted bulk of his church — and he set down a mental cipher against that account. It was waste effort. He felt in his heart that he would never finish it. What was the use?

He tried to whip up the old sense of duty to his calling, to the Church, to the great good which he had been taught he should accomplish. And he could muster up nothing but an irritating sense of hollow wordiness in many of his former dictums and utterances, a vast futility of effort.

Whereupon he at once found himself face to face with a fresh problem, in which the question of squaring his material needs and queer half-formed desires with his actions loomed paramount. In other words Mr. Thompson began, in a fashion scarcely apprehended, upon the painful process of formulating a philosophy of life that would apply to life as it was forcing itself

upon his consciousness — not as he had hitherto conceived life to be.

But he was unable to pin himself down to any definite plan. He could not evolve a clear idea of what to do, nor even of what he wanted to do. And in the interim he did little save sit about his cabin, deep in introspection, chop firewood as needed and cook his plain fare — that was gradually growing plainer, more restricted. Sometimes he varied this by long solitary tramps through the woods along the brushy bank of Lone Moose Creek.

This hermit existence he kept up for over a fortnight. He had fought with Tommy Ashe and he felt diffident about inflicting his company on Tommy, considering the *casus belli*. Nor could he bring himself to a casual dropping-in on Sam Carr. He shrank from meeting Sophie, from hearing the sound of her voice, from feeling the tumult of desire her nearness always stirred up in him. And there was nowhere else to go, no one with whom he could talk. He could not hold converse with the Crees. The Lachlan family relapsed into painful stiffness when he entered their house. There was no common ground between him and them.

He was really marking time until the next mail should arrive at Fort Pachugan. The days were growing shorter, the nights edged with sharp frosts. There came a flurry of snow that lay a day and faded slowly in the eye of the weakening sun.

Mr. Thompson, watching his daily diminishing food supply with sedulous consideration, knew that the winter was drawing near, a season merciless in its rigor.

He knew that one of these days the northerly wind would bring down a storm which would blanket the land with snow that only the sun of the next May would banish. He was ill-prepared to face such an iron-jawed season.

If he stayed there it would just about take his quarterly salary to supply him with plain food and the heavier clothing he needed. But — he drew a long breath and asked himself one day why he should stay there. Why should he? He could not forbear a wry grimace when he tried to see himself carrying out his appointed task faithfully to the end — preaching vainly to uncomprehending ears month after month, year after year, stagnating mentally and suffocating spiritually in those silent forests where God and godly living was not a factor at all; where food, clothing, and shelter loomed bigger than anything else, because until these primary needs were satisfied a man could not rise above the status of a hungry animal.

Yet he shrank from giving up the ministry. He had been bred to it, his destiny sedulously shaped toward that end by the maiden aunts and the theological schools. It was, in effect, his trade. He could scarcely look equably upon a future apart from prayer meetings, from Bible classes, from carefully thought out and eloquently delivered sermons. He felt like a renegade when he considered quitting that chosen field. But he felt also that it was a field in which he had no business now.

He was still in this uncertain frame of mind a few days later when he borrowed a canoe from Lachlan and

set out for the Fort. He had kept away from Carr's for nearly five weeks. Neither Sophie nor her father had come to his cabin again. Once or twice he had hailed Carr from a distance. In the height of his loneliness he had traversed the half-mile to Tommy Ashe's shack up Lone Moose, only to find it deserted. He learned later that Lachlan's oldest son and Ashe had gone partners to run a line of traps away to the north of the village. It occurred to Thompson that he might do the same — if — well, he would see about that when he got home from Pachugan.

The birch bark Lachlan let him have occasioned him many a rare tussle before he finally beached it at the Fort. The fall winds were roughening the lake. It was his first single-handed essay with the paddle. But he derived a certain satisfaction from winning alone against wind and water, and also gained food for thought in the odd circumstance of his growing tendency to get a glow out of purely physical achievements. It did not irk nor worry him now to sweat and strain for hours on end. Instead, he found in that continued, concentrated muscular effort a happy release from troublesome reflection.

His cheque was waiting. As he fingered the green slip whose face value was one hundred and twenty dollars, one fourth of his yearly stipend, he felt relieved, and at the same time oddly reluctant. Not until late in the evening did he get at the root of that reluctance. MacLeod had hospitably insisted on putting him up. They sat in the factor's living room before a great roaring fireplace. Their talk had lapsed into silence.

MacLeod leaned back in his chair, pipe in hand, frowning abstractedly.

"Man," he said at length, his bearded face wrinkled with a smile, "I wish ye were no a preacher wi' labors i' the vineyard of the Lord tae occupy yer time. I'd have ye do a job for mé."

"A job?" Thompson came out of his preoccupation.

"Aye," MacLeod grunted. "A job. A reg'lar man's job. There'd be a reasonable compensation in't. It's a pity," he continued dryly, "that a parson has a mind sae far above purely mateerial conseederation."

"It may surprise you," Mr. Thompson returned almost as dryly, "to know that I have — to a certain extent — modified my views upon what you term material considerations. They are, I have found, more important than I realized."

The factor took his pipe out of his mouth and regarded Thompson with frank curiosity.

"Well," he remarked finally. "Yer a young man. It's no surprisin'." He paused a second.

"Would it interest ye — would ye consider givin' a month or two of yer time to a legitimate enterprise if it was made worth yer while?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes," Thompson answered with equal directness. "If I knew what it was — if it's something I can do."

"I'm just marking time at Lone Moose," he went on after a pause. There was a note of discouragement in his voice. "I'm — well, completely superfluous there. I'd be tempted —"

He did not go farther. Nor did MacLeod inquire into the nature of the suggested temptation. He

merely nodded understandingly at the first part of Thompson's reply.

"Ye could do it fine, I think," he said thoughtfully, "wi' the use of yer head an' the bit coachin' and help I'd provide. It's like this. Pachugan's no so good a deestrict as it used tae be. The fur trade's slowin' down, an' the Company's no so keen as it was in the old days when it was lord o' the North. I mind when a factor was a power — but that time's past. The Company's got ither fish tae fry. Consequently there's times when we're i' the pickle of them that had tae make bricks wi'oot straw. I mean there's times when they dinna gie us the support needful to make the best of what trade there is. Difficulties of transportation for one thing, an' a dyin' interest in a decayin' branch of Company business. Forbye a' that they expect results, just the same.

"Now, I'm short of three verra necessary things, flour, tea, and steel traps. I canna get them frae Edmonton. They didna fully honor my fall requisitions, an' it's too late i' the season now. Yet they'll ask why I dinna get the skins next spring, ye understand. If the Indians dinna get fully supplied here, they'll go elsewhere; they can do that since there's a French firm strung a line o' posts to compete i' the region, ye see.

"Now I havena got the goods I need an' I canna get them frae Company sources. But there's a free trader set himsel' up tae the north o' here last season. The North's no a monopoly for the Company these days, ye ken. They canna run a free trader out i' the old

high-handed fashion. But there's a bit of the old spirit left — an' this laddie's met wi' difficulties, in a way o' speakin'. He's discouraged tae the point where he'll sell cheap; an' he's a fair stock o' the verra goods I want. I'd tak' over his stock to-morrow — but he's ninety-odd miles away. I canna leave here i' the height o' the outfittin' season. I ha' naebody I can leave in charge.

"The job for ye wad be tae go up there, inventory his stock, take it over, an' stay there tae distribute it tae such folk as I'd send tae be supplied in that section. Wi' that completed, transfer the tag-ends doon here. I'd furnish ye a breed tae guide ye there an' interpret for ye, an' tae pass on the quality o' such furs as might offer. He'd grade them, an' ye'd purchase accordin'. Do ye see? It's no a job I can put on anny half-breed. There's none here can write and figure."

"As it sounds," Thompson replied, "I daresay I could manage. You said it would be worth my while. What do I gather from that?"

"Ye'd gather two dollars a day an' everything supplied," MacLeod returned dryly. "Will ye tak' it on?"

Thompson stared into the fire for a minute. Then he looked up at the Factor of Fort Pachugan.

"I'm your man," he said briefly.

"Good," MacLeod grunted. "An' when ye go back tae the preachin' ye'll find the experience has done ye no harm. Now, we'll go over the seetuation in detail to-morrow, an' the next day ye'll start north wi' Joe Lamont. The freeze-up's due, an' it's quicker an' easier travelin' by canoe than wi' dogs."

They talked desultorily for half an hour, until MacLeod, growing drowsy before the big fire, yawned and went off to bed, after pointing out a room for his guest and employee-to-be.

Thompson shut the door of his bedroom and sat down on a stool. He was warm, comfortable, well-fed. But he was not happy, unless the look of him belied his real feelings. He raised his eyes and stared curiously at his reflection in a small mirror on the wall. The scars of Tommy Ashe's fists had long since faded. His skin was a ruddy, healthy hue, the freckles across the bridge of his nose almost wholly absorbed in a coat of tan. But the change that marked him most was a change of expression. His eyes had lost the old, mild look. They were hard and alert, blue mirrors of an unquiet spirit. There was a different set to his lips.

"I don't look like a minister," he muttered. "I look like a man who has been drunk. I feel like that. There must be a devil in me."

He had brought with him from Lone Moose a small bag. Out of this he now took paper, envelopes, a fountain pen, changed his seat to the edge of the bed, and using the stool for a desk began to write. When he had covered two sheets he folded them over the green slip he had that day received, and slid the whole into an envelope which he addressed:

Mr. A. H. Markham,
Sec. M. E. Board of Home Missions,
412 Echo St.,
Toronto, Ont.

He laid the letter on the bed and regarded it with an expression in which regret and relief were equally mingled.

"They'll say — they'll think," he muttered disconnectedly.

He got up, paced across the small room, swung about to look at the letter again.

"I've got to do it," he said aloud defiantly. "It's the only thing I can do. Burn all my bridges behind me. If I can't honestly be a minister, I can at least be a man."

CHAPTER XII

A FORTUNE AND A FLITTING

Christmas had come and gone before Thompson finished his job at Porcupine Lake, some ninety-odd miles, as the crow flies, north of Fort Pachugan. The Porcupine was a marshy stretch of water, the home of muskrat and beaver, a paradise for waterfowl when the heavy hand of winter was lifted, a sheet of ice now, a white oval in the dusky green of the forest. Here the free trader had built a fair-sized structure of logs with goods piled in the front and the rearward end given over to a stove, a table, and two bunks. In this place Thompson and Joe Lamont plied their traffic. MacLeod sent them Indian and half-breed trappers bearing orders for so much flour, so much tea, so many traps, so much powder and ball and percussion caps for their nigh obsolete guns. They took their "debt" and departed into the wilderness, to repay in the spring with furs.

So, by degrees, the free-trader's stock approached depletion, until there remained no more than two good dog teams could haul. With that on sleds, and a few bundles of furs traded in by trappers whose lines radiated from the Porcupine, Thompson and Joe Lamont came back to Fort Pachugan.

The factor seemed well pleased with the undertaking. He checked up the goods and opined that the deal would show a rare profit for the Company.

"Ye have a hundred an' twenty-six dollars due, over an' above a charge or two against ye," he said to Thompson when they went over the accounts. "How will ye have it? In cash? If ye purpose to winter at Lone Moose a credit maybe'll serve as well. Or, if ye go out, ye can have a cheque on the Company at Edmonton."

"Give me the hundred in cash," Thompson decided. "I'll take the twenty odd in grub. I'm going to Lone Moose, but I don't know how long I'll stay there. There's some stuff of mine there that I want to get. After that — I'm a bit undecided."

In those long nights at the Porcupine he had done a good deal of pondering over his next move. He had not yet come to a fixed decision. In a general way he knew that he was going out into the world from whence he had come, with an altogether different point of view, to work out his future along altogether different lines. But he had not made up his mind to do this at once. He was clearly conscious of one imperative craving. That was for a sight of Sophie Carr and a chance to talk to her again. His heart quickened when he thought of their parting. He knew she was anything but indifferent. He was not an egotist, but he knew she harbored a feeling akin to his own, and he built hopes on that, despite her blunt refusal, the logical reasons she had set forth. He hoped again. He saw himself in the way of becoming competent — as the

North, which is a keen judge, appraises competence. He had chucked some of his illusions about relative values. He conceived that in time he might approximate to Sophie Carr's idea of a man.

He wanted to see her, to talk with her, to make her define her attitude a little more clearly. Looking back with his mind a great deal less confused by emotion, he wondered why he had been so dumb, why he had not managed to convey to her that the things she foresaw as denying them happiness or even toleration for each other were not a final state in him, that his ideas and habits and pursuits were in a state of flux that might lead him anywhere. She had thrown cold water on the flame of his passion. But he remembered with a glow of happiness that she had kissed him.

He pondered deeply upon this, wondering much at the singular attraction this girl held for him, the mystery of that strange quality that drew him so. He lacked knowledge of the way and power of women. It had never touched him before. It was indeed as if he had been asleep and had wakened with a start. He was intensely curious about that, curious to know why he, who had met nice girls and attractive women by the score, had come into the North woods to be stirred out of all reason by a slip of a girl with yellow hair and expressive gray eyes and a precocious manner of thinking.

He looked forward eagerly to seeing her again. He somehow felt a little more sure of himself now. He could think of a number of things he wished to ask her, of ideas he wanted to expand into speech. The hurt

of her blank refusal had dulled a little. He could anticipate a keen pleasure just in seeing her.

In the morning he set about outfitting. He had come down from Porcupine with dogs. He had seen dog teams bearing the goods and chattels of innumerable natives. He perceived the essential usefulness of dogs and snowshoes and toboggans in that boundless region of snow. Canoes when the ice went out, dogs and toboggans when winter came again to lock tight the waterways. So during his stay at Porcupine he had accepted the gift of a dog from a Cree, traded tobacco for another, and he and Lamont had whiled away the long evenings in making two sets of harness and a small toboggan. A four-dog team will haul a sizable load. Two would move all the burden of food and gear that he had in his possession. He had learned painfully to walk upon snowshoes — enough so that he was over the poignant ache in the calf of the leg which the North calls *mal de racquette*. Altogether he felt himself fully equal to fare into the wilderness alone. Moreover he had none of that intangible dread of the wilderness which had troubled him when he first came to Lone Moose.

Then it seemed lonely beyond expression, brooding, sinister. It was lonely still — but that was all. He was beginning to grasp the motif of the wilderness, to understand in a measure that to those who adapted themselves thereto it was a sanctuary. The sailor to his sea, the woodsman to his woods, and the *boulevardier* to his beloved avenues! Thompson did not cleave to the North as a woodsman might. But the natural

phenomena of unbroken silences, of vast soundlessness, of miles upon miles of somber forest aisles did not oppress him now. What a man understands he does not fear. The unknown, the potentially terrible which spurs the imagination to horrifying vision, is what bears heavy on a man's soul.

Thompson's preparation for the trail was simple. That lesson he had learned from two months' close association with Joe Lamont. He had acquired a sleeping bag of moosehide, soft tanned. This, his gun and axe, the grub he got from the Pachugan store, he had lashed on the toboggan and put his dogs in harness at daybreak. There would be little enough day to light his steps. Dusk came at midafternoon.

When he had tied the last lashing he shook hands with MacLeod and set out.

He traversed the sixty miles between Pachugan and Lone Moose in two days, by traveling late the first night, under a brilliant moon. It gave him a far vision of the lake shore, black point after black point thrusting out into the immense white level of the lake. Upon that hard smooth surface he could tuck the snowshoes under his lashings and trot over the ice, his dogs at his heels, the frost-bound hush broken by the tinkle of a little bell Joe Lamont had fastened on the lead dog's collar. It rang sweetly, a gay note in that chill void.

That night he drew into a spruce grove, cleared a space for his fire and bed, fed himself hot tea and a bannock, and the hindquarters of a rabbit potted by his rifle on the way. He went to sleep with drowsy eyes peeping at the cold stars from under the flap of

his sleeping bag, at the jagged silhouette of spruce tops cut sharp against the sky.

He drew up before the mission quarters in the gray of the next dusk, and stood again after nigh three months at his own door. The clearing was a white square, all its unlovely litter of fallen trees and half-burned stumps hidden under the virgin snow. The cabin sat squat and brown-walled amid this. On all sides the spruce stood dusky-green. Beyond, over in Lone Moose meadow, Thompson, standing a moment before he opened the door, heard voices faintly, the ringing blows of an axe. Some one laughed.

The frost stirred him out of this momentary inaction. In a few minutes he had a fire glowing in the stove, a lamp lighted, the chill driven from that long deserted room. Except for that chill and a slight closeness, the cabin was as he had left it. Outside, his two dogs snarled and growled over their evening ration of dried fish, and when they had consumed the last scrap curled hardily in the snow bank near the cabin wall.

Thompson had achieved a hair-cut at Pachugan. Now he got out his razor and painstakingly scraped away the accumulated beard. He had allowed it to grow upon Joe Lamont's assertion that "de wheesker, she's help keep hout de fros', Bagosh." Thompson doubted the efficiency of whiskers as a protection, and he wanted to appear like himself. He made that concession consciously to his vanity.

He did not waste much time. While he shaved and washed, his supper cooked. He ate, drew the parka over his head, hooked his toes into the loops of his

snowshoes and strode off toward Carr's house. The timidity that made him avoid the place after his fight with Tommy Ashe and subsequent encounter with Sophie had vanished. The very eagerness of his heart bred a profound self-confidence. He crossed the meadow as hurriedly as an accepted lover.

For a few seconds there was no answer to his knock. Then a faint foot-shuffle sounded, and Carr's Indian woman opened the door. She blinked a moment in the dazzle of lamp glare on the snow until, recognizing him, her brown face lit up with a smile.

"You come back Lone Moose, eh?" she said. "Come in."

Thompson put back the hood of his parka and laid off his mitts. The room was hot by comparison with outdoors. He looked about. Carr's woman motioned him to a chair. Opposite him the youngest Carr squatted like a brown Billiken on a wolfskin. Every detail of that room was familiar. There was the heavy, homemade chair wherein Sam Carr was wont to sit and read. Close by it stood Sophie's favorite seat. A nickel-plated oil lamp gave forth a mellow light under a pale birch-bark shade. But he missed the old man with a pipe in his mouth and a book on his knee, the gray-eyed girl with the slow smile and the sunny hair.

"Mr. Carr and Sophie — are they home?" he asked at length.

The Indian woman shook her head.

"Sam and Sophie go 'way," she said placidly. "No come back Lone Moose long time — maybe no more. Sophie leave sumpin' you. I get."

She crossed the room to a shelf above the serried volumes of Sam Carr's library, lifted the cover of a tin tobacco box and took out a letter. This she gave to Thompson. Then she sat down cross-legged on the wolfskin beside her youngster, looking up at her visitor impassively, her moon face void of expression, except perhaps the mildest trace of curiosity.

Thompson fingered the envelope for a second, scarcely crediting his ears. The letter in his hands conveyed nothing. He did not recognize the writing. He was acutely conscious of a dreadful heartsinking. There was a finality about the Indian woman's statement that chilled him.

"They have gone away?" he said. "Where? When did they go?"

"Long time. Two moon," she replied matter-of-factly. "Dunno where go. Sam say he go — don't know when come back. Leave me house, plenty blanket, plenty grub. Next spring he say he send more grub. That all. Sophie go too."

Thompson stared at her. Perhaps he was not alone in facing something that numbed him.

"Your man go away. Not come back. You sorry? You feel bad?" he asked.

Her lips parted in a wide smile.

"Sam he good man," she said evenly. "Leave good place for me. I plenty warm, plenty to eat. I no care he go. Sam, pretty soon he get old. I want ketchum man, I ketchum. No feel bad. No."

She shook her head, as if the idea amused her. And Mr. Thompson, perceiving that a potential desertion

which moved him to sympathy did not trouble her at all, turned his attention to the letter in his hand. He opened the envelope. There were half a dozen closely written sheets within.

Dear freckle-faced man: there is such a lot I want to say that I don't know where to begin. Perhaps you'll think it queer I should write instead of telling you, but I have found it hard to talk to you, hard to say what I mean in any clear sort of way. Speech is a tricky thing when half of one's mind is dwelling on the person one is trying to talk to and only the other half alive to what one is trying to express. The last time we were together it was hard for me to talk. I knew what I was going to do, and I didn't like to tell you. I wanted to talk and when I tried I blundered. Too much feeling — a sort of inward choking. And the last few days, when I have become accustomed to the idea of going away and familiar with the details of the astonishing change which has taken place in my life, you have been gone. I dare not trust to a casual meeting between here and Pachugan. I do not even know for sure that you have gone to Pachugan, or that you will come back — of course I think you will or I should not write.

But unless you come back to-night you will not see me at Lone Moose. So I'm going to write and leave it with Cloudy Moon to give you when you do come.

Perhaps I'd better explain a little. Dad had an old bachelor brother who — it seems — knew me when I was an infant. Somehow he and dad have kept in some sort of touch. This uncle, whom I do not remember at all, grew moderately wealthy. When he died some six months ago his money was willed equally to dad and myself. It was not wholly unexpected. Dad has often reminded me of that ultimate loophole when

I would grow discontented with being penned up in these dumb forests. I suppose it may sound callous to be pleased with a dead man's gift, but regardless of the ways and means provided it seems very wonderful to me that at last I am going out into the big world that I have spent so many hours dreaming of, going out to where there are pictures and music and beautiful things of all sorts — and men.

You see, I am trying to be brutally frank. I am trying to empty my mind out to you, and a bit of my heart. I like you a lot, big man. I don't mind making that confession. If you were not a preacher — if you did not see life through such narrow eyes, if you were more tolerant, if you had the kindly faculty of putting yourself in the other fellow's shoes now and then, if only your creeds and doctrines and formulas meant anything vital — I — but those cursed ifs cannot be gainsaid.

It's no use, preacher man. That day you kissed me on the creek bank and the morning I came to your cabin, I was conscious of loving you — but it was under protest — under pretty much the same protest with which you care for me. You were both times carried away so by your own passion that for the moment your mental reservations were in abeyance. And although perhaps a breath of that same passion stirred me — I can admit it now when the distance between us will not make that admission a weapon in your hands — yet there was somewhere in me a little voice whispering: "Sophie, it won't do. You can't mix oil and water."

There is a streak of my poor weak and passionate mother in me. But there is also a counterbalancing streak of my father's deliberate judgment. He has schooled me for my ultimate protection — as he has often made plain — to think, to know why I do a thing, to look, even if ever so briefly, before I leap. And I

cannot help it, if when I felt tempted to say the word that would have given me the right to feel the ecstasy of your arms drawing me close and your lips pressed on mine, if in the same breath I was looking ahead and getting a disillusioning glimpse of what life together would mean for you and me, you with your deeply implanted prejudices, your hard and fast conceptions of good and evil, of right and wrong — I what I am, a creature craving pleasure, joy, luxury, if possible, happiness wherever and whenever I can assure myself I have really found it. I wouldn't make a preacher's wife at all, I know. I'd stifle in that sort of atmosphere.

Even if you were not a minister — if you were just plain man — and I wish you were — I don't know. I have to try my wings, now that I have the opportunity. How do I know what turn my vagrant impulses may take? I may be one of those queer, perverted creatures (*vide* Havelock Ellis. You'll find two volumes of his psychology of sex among dad's books) whose instincts incline toward many men in turn. I don't believe I am. A woman's destiny, in so far as I have been able to grasp the feminine function by what I've read and observed in a limited way, is to mate and to rear children. I don't think I'm a variation from the normal type, except in my habit of thinking deeply about these things rather than being moved by purely instinctive reactions. I could be happy ever so simply, I think. Mismated, I should be tigerishly miserable. I know myself, within certain limits — but men I do not know at all, except in theory. I have never had a chance to know men. You and Tommy Ashe have been the only two possibilities. I've liked you both. You, dear freckle-face, with the serious look and muddled ideas, far the better of the two. I don't know why. Tommy Ashe attracted me physically. I recognized that ultimately — and

that alone isn't enough, although it is probably the basis of many matings. So do you likewise attract me, but with a tenderer, more protective passion. I'd like to mother you, to tease you — and mend your socks! Oh, my dear, I can't marry you, and I wish I could. I shrink from submerging my own individuality in yours, and without that sacrifice our life would be one continual clash, until we should hate each other.

And still I know that I am going to be very lonely, to feel for awhile as if I'd lost something. I have felt that way these weeks that you kept to your cabin, avoiding me. I have felt it more keenly since your cabin is empty, and I don't know where you may have gone, nor if you will ever come back. I find myself wondering how you will fare in this grim country. You're such a visionary. You're so impractical. And neither nature nor society is kind to visionaries, to those who will not be adaptable.

Do you understand what I've been trying to tell you? I wonder if you will? Or if I am too incoherent. I feel that perhaps I am. I started out to say things that were bubbling within me, and I am oddly reluctant to say them. I am like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. I am an explorer setting out upon a momentous journey. I am making an experiment that fascinates me. Yet I have regrets. I am uncertain. I am doing the thing which my nature and my intelligence impel me to do, now that I have the opportunity. I am satisfying a yearning, and stifling a desire that could grow very strong if I let myself go.

I can see you scowl. You will say to yourself — looking at it from your own peculiar angle — you will say: "She is not worth thinking about." And unless I have been mistaken in you you will say it very bitterly, and you will be thinking long and hard when you say it. Just as I, knowing that I am wise in going

away from you, just as my reason points clearly to the fact that for me living with you would become a daily protest, a limitation of thought and act that I could not endure, still — knowing all this — I feel a strange reluctance to accepting the road I have chosen, I feel a disconcerting tug at my heart when I think of you — and that is often.

I shall change, of course. So will you. Psychologically, love doesn't endure to death — unless it is nurtured by association, unless it has its foundation in community of interest and effort, a mutual affection that can survive hard knocks.

Good-by, dear freckled man. You have taught me something. I hope I have done as much for you. I'm sorry it couldn't be different. But — a man must be able to stand on his own feet, eh? I leave you to puzzle out what " standing on his own feet " means. Good-by.

SOPHIE.

P. S. Dad says that if you winter at Lone Moose and care to kill a few of the long days you are welcome to help yourself to the books he left. He will tell Cloudy Moon you are to have them all if you want them, or any of them, any time.

Mr. Thompson folded up the sheets with deliberate precision, replaced them in the envelope and tucked the envelope in his pocket. He rose to go. He had a feeling of wanting to escape from that room which those penned pages and swiftly acute memories had filled with a presence it hurt him terribly to recall. His eye fell upon the rows of Carr's books, orderly upon their shelves. The postscript, fresh in his sense-impressions because it came last, and the sight of the books, roused him to a swelling fury of anger.

The heresies of Huxley and Darwin! The blas-

phemies of Tom Paine! The economic diatribes which began with Adam Smith and continued in multiplying volumes down to the latest emanation from professorial intellects in every civilized corner of the earth. The bulky, bitter tomes of Marx and Engels! The Lorias and Leacocks, the tribe of Gumplowicz, and Haeckel, the Lubbocks and Burtons, all that vast array of minds which calmly dissect man and his manifold activities, that draw deeply upon every branch of human knowledge to make clear the age-old evolution and revolution in both the physical and intellectual realm — and which generally leave gods and religions out of account except to analyze them as manifestations of social phenomena. Those damnable documents which he had never read, but which he had been taught to shun as the product of perverted intellects, blasts of scientific artillery, unkindly trained upon sacred concepts!

He put on his parka hood, gave an abrupt "good evening" to Cloudy Moon, and went out into the night which had deepened its shadows while he sat within.

The North lay hushed and hard under a wan moon. The teeth of the frost nipped at him. A wolf lifted a dismal howl as he crossed the meadow. And his anger died. That flare of resentment was, he recognized, but a burst of wrath against Sophie, a passionate protest at her desertion. She had loved him and she had left him, deliberately, calculatingly, left him and love, for the world, the flesh and the devil — tempted by a fortune untimely directed to her hands.

He did not mind about the books. Doubtless they were well enough in their way, a source of practical

knowledge. But he did not care a curse about books or knowledge or faith as he walked through the snow across that gleaming white patch in the dusky forest. His heart cried aloud in forlorn protest against the surging emotions that beset him. His eyes stung. And he fought against that inarticulate misery, against the melancholy that settled upon him like a dank mist.

A man must stand upon his own feet! That stabbed at him, cut across his mood like a slap in the face. Wasn't that what he was learning to do? He lifted his head with a sudden spirit of defiance, a bitter resolution. A man must stand on his own feet. Well, he would. If he could no longer pray and be comforted, he could grit his teeth and struggle and endure. He had begun to perceive that a man must do that physically — set his teeth and endure. In the less concrete matter of the spirit it was much the same.

He turned for a look at the yellow windows of Sam Carr's house. It was a hollow, empty place now, one that he never wanted to see again, like a room in which a beloved person has died and from which the body has been carried away. His eyes lingered on the dim bulk of the house, dusky black and white like a sketch in charcoal.

"Another bridge burned," he said wistfully to himself.

He faced about, crossed the dividing fringe of timber, passing near the walls of his unfinished church. A wry smile twisted his lips. That would remain, the uncompleted monument of his good intentions, the substance of an unrealizable, impractical dream.

Beyond that, as he came out into his own clearing, he saw a light in his cabin, where he had left no light. When he came to the door another toboggan lay beside his own. Strange dogs shifted furtively about at his approach. Warned by these signs he opened the door full of a curiosity as to who, in the accustomed fashion of the North, had stopped and made himself at home.

When the man sitting before the stove with his feet on the rusty front turned his head at Thompson's entrance, he saw, with a mild turn of surprise, that his visitor was Tommy Ashe.

CHAPTER XIII

PARTNERS

"Hello, old man," Tommy greeted cheerfully. "How goes it?"

If it occurred to either of them that the last time they faced each other it had been in hot anger and in earnest endeavor to inflict bodily damage, they were not embarrassed by that recollection, nor did either man hold rancor. Their hands gripped sturdily. It seemed to Thompson, indeed, that a face had never been so welcome. He did not want to sit alone and think. Even apart from that he was uncommonly glad to see Tommy Ashe.

"It doesn't go much at all," he said. "As a matter of fact, I just got back to Lone Moose to-night after being away for weeks."

"Same here," Tommy responded. "I've been trapping. Heard you'd gone to Pachugan, but thought it was only for supplies. I got in to my own diggings to-night, and the shack was so infernally cold and dismal I mushed on down here on the off chance that you'd have a fire and wouldn't mind chinning awhile. Lord, but a fellow surely gets fed up with his own company, back here. At least I do."

Thompson awoke to hospitable formalities.

"Have you had supper?" he asked.

"Stopped and made tea about sundown," Tommy replied. "Thanks just the same. Gad, but it was cold this afternoon. The air fairly crackled."

"Yes," Thompson agreed. "It was very cold."

He drew a stool up to the stove and sat down. Tommy got out his pipe and began whittling shavings of tobacco off a plug.

"Did you know that Carr and his daughter have gone away?" Thompson asked abruptly.

Tommy nodded.

"Donald Lachlan — I've been trapping partners with him, y'know — Donald was home a month or so since. Told me when he came back that the Carrs were gone. I wasn't surprised."

"No?" Thompson could not forbear an inquiring inflection on the monosyllable.

"No," Tommy continued a bit wistfully. "I was talking to Carr a few days after you and I had that — that little argument of ours." He smiled. "He told me then that after fifteen years up here he was inclined to try civilization again. Mostly to give Sophie a chance to see what the world was like, I imagine. I gathered from his talk that some sort of windfall was coming his way. But I daresay you know more about it than I do."

"No," Thompson replied. "I've been away — a hundred miles north of Pachugan — for two months. I didn't know anything about it till to-night."

Tommy looked at him keenly.

"Jolted you, eh, old man?" There was a quiet sympathy in his tone.

"A little," Thompson admitted grimly. "But I'm getting used to jolts. I had no claim on — on them."

"We both lost out," Tommy Ashe said thoughtfully. "Sophie Carr is one woman in ten thousand. I think she's the most remarkable girl I ever came across anywhere. She knows what she wants, and neither of us quite measured up. She liked me too — but she wouldn't marry me. Before you came she tried to convince me of that. And I wasn't slow to see that you interested her, that as a man she gave you a good deal of thought, although your — er — your profession's one she rather makes light of. Women are queer. I didn't know but you might have taken her by storm. And then again, I rather imagined she'd back off when you got serious."

"I was a fool," Thompson muttered.

"I wouldn't say that," Tommy responded gently. "A man couldn't resist her. I've known a lot of women one way and another. I never knew one could hold a candle to her. She has a mind like a steel trap, that girl. She understood things in a flash, moods and all that. She'd make a real chum, as well as a wife. Most women aren't, y'know. They're generally just one or the other. No, I'd never call myself a fool for liking Sophie too well. In fact a man would be a fool if he didn't.

"She likes men too," Tommy went on musingly. "She knew it. I suppose she'll be friendly and curious and chummy, and hurt men without meaning to until

she finds the particular sort of chap she wants. Oh, well."

"How's the trapping?"

Thompson changed the subject abruptly. He could not bear to talk about that, even to Tommy Ashe who understood out of his own experience, who had exhibited a rare and kindly understanding.

"I've been wondering if I could make a try at that. I've got to do something. I've quit the ministry."

Tommy looked at him for a second.

"Why did you get out?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm not fitted for it," Thompson returned. "I've been through hell for four months, and I've lost something — some of that sublime faith that a man must have. I'm not certain about a lot of things I have always taken for granted. I'm not certain I have an immortal soul which is worth saving, let alone considering myself peculiarly fitted to save other people's souls. I'd be like a blind man leading people with good eyes. It has come to seem to me that I've been trained for the ministry as a carpenter is trained for his trade. I can't go on feeling like that. I'm too much interested in my own personal salvation. I'm too keenly conscious of a tremendous ignorance about tremendously important things to continue setting myself up as a finger post for other men's spiritual guidance. If I stay with the church now it seems to me it will only be because I lack courage to get out and make my living along lines that won't be so easy. I'd despise myself if I did that. So I've resigned — quite a while ago, to be exact. I've been working for the H. B. two months.

That's why I asked about the trapping. I've been casting about for what I'd best try next."

Tommy sat silent. When he did speak he touched very briefly on Thompson's confession of faith — or rather the lack of it.

"When a man's heart isn't in a thing," said he, "it's better for him to drop it. About the trapping, now — I don't think you'd do much at that with the season so far along. This district is pretty well covered by the natives. You'd get into difficulties right off the bat over setting traps on their territory. They have a rude sort of understanding about where their several trap lines shall run. And for some reason or other furs are getting scarce. Up where young Lachlan and I were it was pretty fair for awhile. We took some good skins. Lately we did a lot of trap-tending for nothing much. I got fed up with it. Fact is, I'm about fed up with this region. I think I'll pull out."

"I've been thinking the same thing," Thompson observed. "There isn't much here for a man."

"Not now," Tommy amended. "I'd have been gone long ago only for Sophie Carr. That was the magnet that held me. It happens that I've come to something of your pass, right now. I can't afford to loaf any longer, living off the wilderness. I had a bit of an income to keep me in loose change when I wanted a taste of towns. But that's been chopped off — probably for good. I'm strictly on my own henceforth. Every penny I spend will first have to be earned. And so," he hesitated briefly, "I've considered a move to the Coast, the Pacific, y'know. Going over the conti-

nental divide while the snow makes a dog team useful. Then I'd go down the western streams by boat — dug-out canoe or bateaux, or whatever simple craft a man could make himself in the woods. Probably be the last big trip I'll get a chance at. I'll have roughed it clear across North America then, and I rather fancy winding up that way. But it's a big undertaking single-handed. I'm not so partial to an Indian for company; besides the fact that I'd have to pay him wages and dollars count with me now. A fellow likes some one he can talk to. If you've cut the cloth and are at loose ends, why not come along? "

Thompson looked at him a second.

" Do you mean it? " he asked. " I'm not what you'd call a good hand on the trail. You might find me a handicap."

Tommy grinned.

" I've got the impression you're a chap that can hold his end up," he drawled. " I've an idea we'd make a go of it, all right."

" I believe we would," Thompson asserted impulsively. " Hanged if I haven't a mind to take you at your word."

" Do," Tommy urged earnestly. " The Pacific coast has this part of the interior frazzled when it comes to opportunities. That's what we're both after, isn't it? An opportunity to get on — in plain English, to make some money? It's really simple to get up the Peace and through the mountains and on down to southeastern Alaska or somewhere in northern B. C. It merely means some hard mushing. And neither of us is very

soft. You've begun to cut your eyeteeth on the wilderness. I can see that."

"Yes, I believe I have," Thompson assented, "I'm learning to take as a matter of course a good many things that I used to rather dread. I find I have a hankering to be on the move. Maybe I'll end up as a tramp. If you want a partner for that journey I'm your man."

"Shake," Tommy thrust out his hand with a boyish sort of enthusiasm. "We'll have no end of a time."

They sat up till a most unseemly hour talking over the details of that long trek. Tommy Ashe was warmed with the prospect, and some of his enthusiasm fired Thompson, proved strangely infectious. The wanderlust, which Wesley Thompson was only beginning to feel in vague stirrings, had long since become the chief motif in Tommy's life. He did not unburden himself at length. It was simply through stray references, offhand bits of talk, as they checked up resources and distances, that Thompson pieced out the four years of Ashe's wanderings across Canada — four years of careless, happy-go-lucky drifting along streams and through virgin forest, sometimes alone, sometimes with a partner; four years of hunting, fishing, and camping all the way from Labrador to Lone Moose. Tommy had worked hard at this fascinating game. He confessed that with revenue enough to keep him going, to vary the wilderness with an occasional month in some city, he could go on doing that sort of thing with an infinite amount of pleasure.

But something had gone wrong with the source of

the funds that came quarterly. Tommy did not appear to regret that. But he realized its significance. He would have to work. Having to work he meant to work as he had played, with all his heart and to some purpose. He had an ambitious idea of pressing Fortune to her lair. He was young and very sanguine. His cheerful optimism was the best possible antidote for the state of mind in which he found Thompson.

They went to bed at last. With breakfast behind them they went up to Ashe's cabin and brought down to Thompson's a miscellaneous collection of articles that Tommy had left behind when he went trapping. Tommy had four good dogs in addition to the brown retriever. By adding Thompson's pair and putting all their goods on one capacious toboggan they achieved a first-class outfit.

In the North when a man sets out on a winter journey, or any sort of journey, in fact, his preparations are speedily made. He loads his sled, hitches his dogs, takes his rifle in hand, hooks his toes in his snowshoes and goes his way.

This is precisely the course Tommy Ashe and Thompson followed. Having decided to go, they went, and neither of them took it as a serious matter that they were on the first leg of a twelve-hundred-mile jaunt in the deep of winter across a primitive land.

To be exact in dates it was February the first when they touched at Pachugan, where Tommy traded in his furs, and where they took on a capacity load of grub. West of the lake head they bore across a low, wooded delta and debouched upon Peace River's frozen surface.

After that it was plod-plod-plod, one day very much like another, cold with coldness of the sub-Arctic, the river a white band through heavy woods, nights that were crisp and still as death, the sky a vast dome sprinkled with flickering stars, brilliant at times with the Northern Lights, that strange glow that flashes and shimmers above the Pole, now a banner of flame, again only a misty sheen. Sometimes it seemed an unreality, that silence, that immensity of hushed forest, those vast areas in which life was not a factor. When a blizzard whooped out of the northern quarter, holding them close to the little tent and the tiny sheet-iron stove, when they sat for hours with their hands clasped over their knees, listening to the voice of the wilderness whispering sibilantly in the swaying boughs, it seemed utterly impossible that these frigid solitudes could ever know the kindliness of summer, that those cold white spaces could ever be warm and sunny and bright with flowers.

But there were compensations. Two men cannot eat out of the same pot — figuratively speaking — sleep huddled close together for the warmth that is in their bodies, hear no voices but their own, exert a common effort to a common end day after day, until the days become weeks and the weeks marshal themselves into calendar months — no two men born of woman can sustain this enforced intimacy over a long period without acquiring a positive attitude toward each other. They achieve a contemptuous tolerance, or they achieve a rare and lasting friendship. It was the fortune of Tommy Ashe and Wesley Thompson to cultivate the

latter. They arrived at it by degrees, in many forty-below-zero camps along the Peace, in the shadow of those towering mountains where the Peace cuts through the backbone of North America. It grew out of mutual respect, a wordless sense of understanding, a conviction that each did his best to play the game fair and square.

So that, as they worked westward and gave over their toboggan on the waters of a stream far beyond the Rockies, when Spring began to touch the North with her magic wand they grew merry, galvanized by the spirit of adventure. They could laugh, and sometimes they could sing. And they planned largely, with the sanguine air of youth. On the edges — not in the depths — of that wild and rugged land where manifold natural resources lay untouched, it seemed as if a man had but to try hard enough in order to succeed. They had conquered an ominous stretch of wilderness. They would conquer with equal facility whatever barriers they found between them and fortune.

The sweep of Spring's progress across the land found them west of the Coast Range by May, in a wild and forbidding region where three major streams — the Skeena, the Stikine, and the Naas — take their rise. For many days their advance was through grim canyons, over precipitous slopes, across glaciers, bearing always westward, until the maps with which Tommy Ashe was equipped showed them they were descending the Stikine. Here they rested in a country full of game animals and birds and fish, until the height of the spring torrents had passed. During this time they fashioned a canoe out of a cedar tree, big enough to carry them and the

dogs which had served so faithfully as pack animals over that last mountainous stretch. The Stikine was swift and forbidding, but navigable. Thus at last, in the first days of the salmon run, they came out upon tidewater, down to Wrangel by the sea.

There was in Thompson's mind no more thought of burned bridges, no heartache and empty longing, only an eagerness of anticipation. He had come a long way, in a double sense. He had learned something of the essential satisfaction of striving. A tough trail had served to toughen the mental and moral as well as the physical fiber of him. He did not know what lay ahead, but whatever did so lie would never dismay him again as things had done in the past, in that too-recent vivid past.

He was quite sure of this. His mood was tinctured with recklessness when he summed it up in words. A man must stand on his own feet!

He would never forget that sentence. It was burned into his memory. He was beginning to understand what Sophie Carr meant by it. Looking backward he could see that he never had stood on his own feet like a man. Always he had required props. And they had been forthcoming from the time the prim spinster aunts took his training in hand until he came to Lone Moose self-consciously, rather flauntingly, waving the banner of righteousness. Thompson could smile wryly at himself now. He could see the unreckonable element of chance functioning largely in a man's life.

And in the meantime he went about Wrangel looking for a job!

CHAPTER XIV

THE RESTLESS FOOT

Being in a town that was at once a frontier camp and a minor seaport, and being there at a season when the major industry of salmon-packing was at its height, the search of Tommy Ashe and Thompson for a job was soon ended. They were taken on as cannery hands — a "hand" being the term for unskilled laborers as distinguished from fishermen, can machine experts, engineers and the like. As such they were put to all sorts of tasks, work that usually found them at the day's end weary, dirty with fish scales and gurry, and more than a little disgusted. But they were getting three dollars and a half a day, and it was practically clear, which furnished a strong incentive to stick it out as long as the season lasted — a matter of two more months.

"By that time," said Tommy Ashe, "we'll have enough coin to venture into fresh fields. My word, but we do earn this money. It's the nastiness I object to, not the work. I shan't forget this first hundred dollars I've earned by the sweat of my manly brow."

In the fullness of time the salmon run came to an

end. The pack being finished the hands were paid off. In company with half a hundred others, Ashe and Thompson were shipped from the Suchoi Bay Canneries back to Wrangel again.

In Wrangel, before they had been there four hours, Thompson got the offer of work in a pile camp. He took his prospective job under advisement and hunted up Tommy Ashe. Tommy dangled his legs over the edge of the bed in their room, and considered the matter.

"No," he said finally. "I don't believe I'll take it on. I think I'll go down to Vancouver. I'm about two hundred dollars strong, and I don't really see anything but a poor sort of living in this laboring-man stuff. I'm going to try some business proposition. I've got a pretty fair acquaintance with motor cars. I might be able to get in on the selling end of the game, and there is good money in that in the way of commissions. I know some people there who should be able to show me the ropes. In a big live seaport like that there must be chances. Yes, I think I'll try Vancouver. You'd better come too, Wes."

Thompson shook his head. He knew nothing of business. He had no trade. For a time — until he came face to face with an opportunity he could recognize as such — he shrank from tackling a city. He had not quite Tommy's confidence in himself.

"No," he said. "I'd like to — but I don't believe I'd make good. And I don't want to get in a position where I'd have to be looking for somebody to throw me a life line. I don't seem to mind common hard work so much. I don't imagine I could jump right into a

town and be any better off than I would be here. When I get a little more money ahead I'll be tempted to take a chance on a city. But not yet."

From this position Tommy's persuasion failed to move him. Tommy was earnest enough, and perfectly sincere in promising to see him through. But that was not what Thompson wanted. He was determined that in so far as he was able he would make his own way unaided. He wanted to be through with props forever. That had become a matter of pride with him. He went back and told the pile-camp boss that he would report in two days.

A southbound steamer sailed forty-eight hours later. She backed away from the Wrangel wharf with Tommy waving his hand to his partner on the pierhead. Thompson went back to their room feeling a trifle blue, as one does at parting from a friend. But it was not the moodiness of uncertainty. He knew what he was going to do. He had simply got used to Tommy being at his elbow, to chatting with him, to knowing that some one was near with whom he could try to unravel a knotty problem or hold his peace as he chose. He missed Tommy. But he knew that although they had been partners over a hard country, had bucked a hard trail like men and grown nearer to each other in the stress of it, they could not be Siamese twins. His road and Tommy's road was bound to fork. A man had to follow his individual inclination, to live his own life according to his lights. And Tommy's was for town and the business world, while his — as yet — was not.

So for the next four months Thompson lived and

worked on a wooded promontory a few miles north of Wrangel, very near the mouth of the river down which he and Tommy Ashe had come to the sea. He was housed with thirty other men in a bunkhouse of hand-split cedar; he labored every day felling and trimming tall slender poles for piling that would ultimately hold up bridges and wharves. The crew was a cosmopolitan lot so far as nationality went. In addition they were a tougher lot than Thompson had ever encountered. He never quite fitted in. They knew him for something of a tenderfoot, and they had not the least respect for his size — until he took on and soundly whipped two of them in turn before the bunkhouse door, with the rest of the thirty, the boss and the cook for spectators. Thompson did not come off scathless, but he did come off victor, although he was a bloody sight at the finish. But he fought in sheer desperation, because otherwise he could not live in the camp. And he smiled to himself more than once after that fracas, when he noted the different attitude they took toward him. Might was perhaps not right, but unless a man was both willing and able to fight for his rights in the workaday world that was opening up to him, he could never be very sure that his rights would be respected.

Along with this incidental light upon the ways of his fellow working-men he learned properly how to swing an axe; he grew accustomed to dragging all day on the end of a seven-foot crosscut saw, to lift and strain with a cant hook. The hardening process, begun at Lone Moose, continued unceasingly. If mere physical hardihood had been his end, he could easily have passed

for a finished product. He could hold his own with those broad-shouldered Swedes and Michigan loggers at any turn of the road. And that was a long way for a man like Thompson to come in the course of twelve months. If he could have been as sure of a sound, working philosophy of life as he was of the fitness of his muscles he would have been well satisfied. Sometimes it was a puzzle to him why men existed, why the will to live was such a profound force, when living was a struggle, a vexation, an aimless eating and sleeping and working like a carthorse. Where was there any plan, any universal purpose at all?

Having never learned dissipation as a form of amusement, nor having yet been driven to it by the sheer deadliness of incessant, monotonous labor, Thompson was able to save his money. When he went to Wrangel once a month he got a bath, a hair-cut, and some magazines to read, perhaps an article or two of necessary clothing. That was all his financial outlay. He came back as clear-eyed as when he left, with the bulk of his wages in his pocket, where some of his fellows returned with empty pockets and aching heads.

Wherefore, when the winter snows at last closed down the pile camp Thompson had accumulated four hundred dollars. Also he had made an impression on the contractor by his steadiness, to such an extent that the man offered him a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month to come back and take charge of a similar camp in the spring. But Thompson, like Tommy Ashe, had grown troubled with the wandering foot. The money in hand gave him security against want in strange

places. He would not promise to be on hand in the spring. Like Tommy, he had a notion to try town, to see for himself what opportunity town afforded. And he pitched on Vancouver, not alone because Tommy Ashe was there, but because it was the biggest port on Canada's western coast. He had heard once from Tommy. He was a motor-car salesman now, and he was doing well. But Tommy's letter was neither long nor graphic in its descriptions. It left a good deal of Vancouver to Thompson's imagination. However, like the bear that went over the mountain, Thompson thought he would go and see what he could see.

Wrangel lies well within the Inside Passage, that great waterway which is formed between the mainland and a chain of islands that sweeps from Cape Flattery in the south to the landward end of the Aleutians. All the steamers that ply between Puget Sound and Skagway take that route. Seldom do the vessels plying between southern ports and the far beaches of Nome come inside. They are deep-sea craft, built for offshore work. So that one taking a steamer at Wrangel can travel in two directions only, north to Skagway, south to Puget Sound.

The booking facilities at Wrangel are primitive, to say the least. When Thompson inquired about southbound passage, he was told to go down and board the first steamer at the pierhead, and that it would leave at eleven that night. So he took all his meager belongings, which he could easily carry in a blanket roll and a sailor's ditty-bag, and went down half an hour before sailing time. There seemed no one to bar his passage,

and he passed up the gangplank aboard a two-funnelled, clean-decked steamer, and made his way to a smoking room aft.

There were a few men lounging about, men of the type he was accustomed to seeing in Wrangel, miners, prospectors and the like, clad in mackinaws and heavy laced boots. Thompson, habitually diffident, asked no questions, struck up no conversations after the free and easy manner of the North. He laid down his bag and roll, sat awhile listening to the shift of feet and the clatter of cargo winches on deck and pierhead. Then, growing drowsy, he stretched himself on a cushioned seat with his bag for a pillow and fell asleep.

He woke with an odd sensation of his bed dropping out from under him. Coming out of a sound slumber he was at first a trifle bewildered, but instinctively he grasped a stanchion to keep himself from sliding across the floor as the vessel took another deep roll. The smoking room was deserted. He gained his feet and peered out of a window. All about him ran the uneasy heave of the sea. Try as he would his eyes could pick up no dim shore line. And it was not particularly dark, only a dusky gloom spotted with white patches where a comber reared up and broke in foam. He wondered at the ship's position. It did not conform to what he had been told of the Inside Passage.

And while he was wondering a ship's officer in uniform walked through the saloon. He cast a quick glance at Thompson and smiled slightly.

"This outside roll bother you?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Outside?" Thompson grasped at the word's significance. "Are we going down outside?"

"Sure," the man responded. "We always do."

"I wonder," Thompson began to sense what he had done, "I say — isn't this the *Roanoke* for Seattle?"

The mate's smile deepened. "Uh-uh," he grinned. "This is the *Simoon*, last boat of the season from outside northern points. We had to put into Wrangel, which we rarely do. The *Roanoke* berthed right across the wharf from us. Got aboard us by mistake, did you?"

Thompson nodded.

"Well," the officer continued, "sometimes the longest way round is the shortest way home. We don't touch this side the Golden Gate. So you may as well see the purser when he gets up and have him assign you a berth. It's pretty near daylight now."

He nodded and went on. Thompson, holding fast, getting his first uncomfortable experience of the roll and recovery of a ship in a beam sea, made his way out on the after deck. Holding on the rail he peered over the troubled water that was running in the open mouth of Dixon Entrance, beyond which lay the vast breadth of the Pacific, an unbroken stretch to the coast of Japan.

Again Chance was playing the deuce with his calculations. For a few minutes he felt uncommonly irritated. He had not started for San Francisco. He did not want to go to San Francisco. Still — what was the odds? San Francisco was as good as any other town. He shrugged his shoulders, and feeling his way to a coiled hawser sat down in the bight of it to contend with the first, faint touch of seasickness.

CHAPTER XV

THE WORLD IS SMALL

For reasons of economy Thompson put himself up at a cheap rooming-house well out Market Street. His window looked out upon that thoroughfare which is to San Francisco what the aorta is to the arterial system. Gazing down from a height of four stories he could see a never-ending stir, hear the roar of vehicular traffic which swelled from a midnight murmur to a deep-mouthed roar in the daylight hours. And on either side the traffic lane there swept a stream of people like the current of the Stikine River.

He was not a stranger to cities, no rustic gazing open-mouthed at throngs and tall buildings. His native city of Toronto was a fair-sized place as American and Canadian cities go. But it was not a seaport. It was insular rather than cosmopolitan; it took its character from its locale rather than from a population gathered from the four quarters of the globe. San Francisco — is San Francisco — a melting-pot of peoples, blown through with airs from far countries, not wholly rid of the aura of Drake and the conquistadores of Spain even in these latter days of commercial expansion. And all of San Francisco's greatness and color and wealth is crowded upon a peninsula, built upon

rolling hills. What the city lacks of spaciousness is compensated by action. Life goes at a great pace.

It made a profound impression on Thompson, since he had reached the stage where he was keenly susceptible to external impressions from any source whatever. Those hurrying multitudes, that unending stir, the kaleidoscopic shifts of this human antheap made him at first profoundly lonely, immeasurably insignificant, just as the North had made him feel when he was new to it. But just as he had shaped himself to that environment, so he felt — as he had not at first felt in the North — that in time, with effort, he would become an integral part of this. Here the big game was played. It was the antithesis of the North inasmuch as all this activity had a purely human source and was therefore in some measure akin to himself. The barriers to be overcome and the problems to be solved were social and monetary. It was less a case of adapting himself by painful degrees to a hostile primitive environment than a forthright competitive struggle to make himself a master in this sort of environment.

How he should go about it he had no definite idea. He would have to be an opportunist, he foresaw. He had no illusions about his funds in hand being a prime lever to success. That four hundred dollars would not last forever, nor would it be replenished by any effort save his own. It afforded him a breathing spell, a chance to look about, to discover where and how he should begin at the task of proving himself upon the world.

He had no misgivings about making a living. He

could always fall back on common labor. But a common laborer is socially of little worth, financially of still less value. Thompson had to make money — using the phrase in its commonly accepted sense. He subscribed to that doctrine, because he was beginning to see that in a world where purchasing power is the prime requisite a man without money is the slave of every untoward circumstance. Money loomed before Thompson as the key to freedom, decent surroundings, a chance to pursue knowledge, to so shape his life that he could lend a hand or a dollar to the less fortunate.

He still had those stirrings of altruism, a ready sympathy, an instinct to help. Only he saw very clearly that he could not be of any benefit to even a limited circle of his fellow men when at every turn of his hand economic pressure bore so hard upon him as an individual. He began to see that getting on in the world called for complete concentration of his efforts upon his own well-being. A pauper cannot be a philanthropist. One cannot take nothing from nothing and make something. To be of use to others he must first grasp what he required for himself.

Once he was settled and familiar enough with San Francisco to get from the Ferry Building to the Mission and from the Marina to China Basin without the use of a map he began to cast about for an opening. To make an apprentice beginning in any of the professions required education. He had that, he considered. It did not occur to him by what devious routes men arrived at distinction in the professions. He thought of studying for the law until the reception he got in various

offices where he went seeking for information discouraged him in that field. Law students were a drug on the market.

"My dear young man," one kindly, gray-haired attorney told him, "you'd be wasting your time. The law means a tremendous amount of intellectual drudgery, and a slim chance of any great success unless you are gifted with a special aptitude for certain branches of it. All the great opportunities for a young man nowadays lie in business and salesmanship."

Business and salesmanship being two things of which Thompson knew himself to be profoundly ignorant, he made little headway. A successful business operation, so far as he could observe, called for capital which he did not possess. Salesmanship, when he delved into the method of getting his foot on that rung of the ladder, required special training, knowledge of a technical sort. That is, really successful salesmanship. The other kind consisted of selling goods over a counter for ten dollars per — with an excellent chance of continuing in that unenviable situation until old age overtook him. This was an age of specialists — and he had no specialty. Moreover, every avenue that he investigated seemed to be jammed full of young men clamoring for a chance. The skilled trades had their unions, their fixed hours of labor, fixed rates of pay. The big men, the industrial managers, the men who stood out in the professions, they had their own orbit into which he could not come until he had made good. There were the two forces, the top and the bottom of the workaday world. And he was in between, like a fish out of water.

Wherefore Thompson continued looking about for a number of weeks. He looked for work, without finding it save in street gangs and at labor that was mostly done by Greeks and Italians fresh from Europe. A man had to begin at the bottom, he realized, but he did not desire to begin at the bottom of a ditch. He did not seek for such small clerical jobs as he knew himself able to fill. He did not mean to sit on a high stool and ruin his eyes over interminable rows of figures. That much at least the North had done for him — fixed him firmly in the resolve that if he had to sweat for a pittance it would not be within four walls, behind dusty windows. He could always go back to the woods. Sometimes he thought he would better do that out of hand, instead of wasting his time and money seeking in a city for the goose that was to lay him golden eggs.

When he was not hard on the trail of some definite opening sheer loneliness drove him out on the streets. His room was a cheerless place, a shelter for him when he slept and nothing more. Many a time, lacking any real objective, he covered miles of San Francisco's streets. He sought out parks, beaches, public buildings. At night he would drift, a silent, lonely spirit, among the crowds that ebbed and flowed in the downtown district that was a blaze of light.

That restless wandering brought him by chance one evening along a certain avenue which shall be nameless, because it is no longer the haunt of the soap-boxer. This curious thoroughfare lay upon the borderline between the smart shopping district and San Francisco's Chinatown. For a matter of two or three blocks the

street was given over to an impromptu form of public assembly, a poor man's debating ground, an open forum where any citizen with a grievance, a theory, or even merely the gift of gab might air his views and be reasonably sure of an audience. In the evening there was always a crowd. Street fakirs plied their traffic under sputtering gas torches, dispensing, along with a ready flow of glib chatter, marvellous ointments, cure-alls, soap, suspenders, cheap safety razors, anything that would coax stray dimes and quarters from the crowd.

But the street fakirs were in the minority. The percentage of gullible ones was small. Mostly it was a place of oratory, the haunt of propagandists. Thompson listened to Social Democrats, Social Laborites, syndicalists, radicals, revolutionaries, philosophical anarchists, men with social and economic theories of the extremist type. But they talked well. They had a grasp of their subject. They had on tap tremendous quantities of all sorts of knowledge. The very extent of their vocabulary amazed Thompson. He heard scientific and historical authorities quoted and disputed, listened to arguments waged on every sort of ground — from biological complexities which he could not understand to agricultural statistics which he understood still less. A lot of it perplexed and irritated him, because the terminology was over his head. And the fact that he could not follow these men in full intellectual flight spurred him to find the truth or falsity of those things for himself. He got an inkling of the economic problems that afflict society. He found himself assenting offhand to the reasonable theorem that

a man who produced wealth was entitled to what he produced. He listened to many a wordy debate in which the theory of evolution was opposed to the seven-day creation. There was thus revived in him some of those troublesome perplexities which Sam and Sophie Carr had first aroused.

In the end, lacking profitable employment and growing dubious of obtaining it during the slack industrial season which then hovered over California, he turned to the serried shelves of the city library. Once started along this road he became an habitué, spending in a particular chair at a certain table anywhere from three to six hours a day, deep in a book, not to be deterred therefrom by the usual series of mental shocks which a man, full-fed all his life on conventions and dogmas and superficial thinking, gets when he first goes seriously and critically into the fields of scientific conclusions.

He was seated at a reading table one afternoon, nursing his chin in one hand, deep in a volume of Huxley's " Lectures and Essays " which was making a profound impression upon him through its twin merits of simple, concise language and breadth of vision. There was in it a rational explanation of certain elementary processes which to Thompson had never been accounted for save by means of the supernatural, the mysterious, the inexplicable. Huxley was merely sharpening a function of his mind which had been dormant until he ran amuck among the books. He began to perceive order in the universe and all that it contained, that natural phenomena could be interpreted by a study of nature, that there was something more than a

name in geology. And he was so immersed in what he read, in the printed page and the inevitable speculations that arose in his mind as he conned it, that he was only subconsciously aware of a woman passing his seat.

Slowly, as a man roused from deep sleep looks about him for the cause of dimly heard noises, so now Thompson's eyes lifted from his book, and, with his mind still half upon the last sentence read, his gaze followed the girl now some forty feet distant in the long, quiet room.

There was no valid reason why the rustle of a woman's skirt in passing, the faint suggestion of some delicate perfume, should have focussed his attention. He saw scores of women and girls in the library every day. He passed thousands on the streets. This one, now, upon whom he gazed with a detached interest, was like many others, a girl of medium height, slender, well-dressed.

That was all — until she paused at a desk to have speech with a library assistant. She turned then so that her face was in profile, so that a gleam of hair showed under a wide leghorn hat. And Thompson thought there could scarcely be two women in the world with quite so marvellous a similarity of face and figure and coloring, nor with quite the same contour of chin and cheek, nor the same thick hair, yellow like the husks of ripe corn or a willow leaf in the autumn. He was just as sure that by some strange chance Sophie Carr stood at that desk as he was sure of himself sitting in an oak chair at a reading table. And he rose impulsively to go to her.

She turned away in the same instant and walked quickly down a passage between the rows of shelved

books. Thompson could not drive himself to hurry, nor to call. He was sure — yet not too sure. He hated to make himself appear ridiculous. Nor was he overconfident that if it were indeed Sophie Carr she would be either pleased or willing to renew their old intimacy. And so, lagging faint-heartedly, he lost her in the maze of books.

But he did not quite give up. He was on the second floor. The windows on a certain side overlooked the main entrance. He surmised that she would be leaving. So he crossed to a window that gave on the library entrance and waited for an eternity it seemed, but in reality a scant five minutes, before he caught sight of a mauve suit on the broad steps. Looking from above he could be less sure than when she stood at the desk. But the girl halted at the foot of the steps and standing by a red roadster turned to look up at the library building. The sun fell full upon her upturned face. The distance was one easily to be spanned by eyes as keen as his. Thompson was no longer uncertain. He was suddenly, acutely unhappy. The old ghosts which he had thought well laid were walking, rattling their dry bones forlornly in his ears.

Sophie got into the machine. The red roadster slid off with gears singing their metallic song as she shifted through to high. Thompson watched it turn a corner, and went back to his table with a mind past all possibility of concentrating upon anything between the covers of a book. He put the volume back on its shelf at last and went out to walk the streets in aimless, restless fashion, full of vivid, painful memories, troubled by

a sudden flaring up of emotions which had lain so long dormant he had supposed them dead.

Here in San Francisco he had not expected to behold Sophie in the enjoyment of her good fortune. Yet there was no reason why she should not be here. Thompson damned under his breath the blind chance which had set him aboard the wrong steamer at Wrangel.

But, he said to himself after a time, what did it matter? In a city of half a million they were as far apart as if he were still at Lone Moose and she God only knew where. That powerful roadster, the sort of clothes she wore, the general air of well-being which he had begun to recognize as a characteristic of people whose social and financial position is impregnable — these things served to intensify the gulf between them which their radical differences of outlook had originally opened. No, Sophie Carr's presence in San Francisco could not possibly make any difference to him. He repeated this emphatically — with rather more emphasis than seemed necessary.

CHAPTER XVI

A MEETING BY THE WAY

But he found it did make a difference, a profoundly disturbing difference. He had grown insulated against the memory of Sophie Carr tugging at his heartstrings as the magnetic north pulls on the compass needle. He had grown free of both thought and hope of her. There had been too many other vital things pressing upon him these months of adventure in toil, too many undeniable, everyday factors of living present at every turn, hourly insistent upon being coped with, for him to nurse old sad dreams and longings. So he had come at last to think of that passionate yearning as a disease which had run its course.

Now, to his dismay, it recurred in all its old virulence, at a mere glimpse of Sophie. The floodgates of memory loosed bitter waters upon him, to make his heart heavy and spoil his days of passive content. It angered him to be so hopelessly troubled. But he could not gainsay the fact.

It made San Francisco a dreary waste. Try as he would he could not keep Sophie Carr from being the sun around which the lesser nebulæ of his thought continually revolved. He could no more help a wistful lookout for her upon San Francisco's streets than he

could help breathing. Upon the rolling phalanxes of motor cars his gaze would turn with watchful expectation, and he took to scanning the faces of the passing thousands, a lonely, shy man with a queer glow in his eyes. That, of course, was only in moments of forgetfulness. Then he would pull himself together with a resentful irritation and tax himself with being a weak fool and stalk along about his business.

But his business had lost its savor, just as his soul had lost its slowly-won serenity. His business had no importance to any save himself. It had been merely to winter decently and economically with an eye cocked for such opportunities of self-betterment as came his way, and failing material opportunity in this Bagdad of the Pacific coast to make the most of his enforced idleness.

And now the magic of the colorful city had departed along with the magic of the books. The downtown streets ceased to be a wonderful human panorama which he loved to watch. The hushed reading room where he had passed so many contented hours was haunted by a presence that obscured the printed page. He would find himself staring absently at an open book, the words blurred and overlaid with mental pictures of Lone Moose, of Sophie sitting on the creek bank, of his unfinished church, forlorn and gaunt in the winter snows and the summer silences, of Tommy Ashe trudging across the meadow, gun in hand, of old Sam Carr in his moosehide chair, of the Indians, the forest, of all that goes to make the northern wilderness — and of himself moving through it all, an unheroic figure, a

man who had failed in his work, in his love, in everything.

That, chiefly, was what stirred him anew to action, a suddenly acute sense of failure, of a consciousness that he was drifting instead of doing. He found himself jarred out of the even tenor of his way. San Francisco filled him with dissatisfaction now, knowing that she was there. If the mere knowledge that Sophie Carr dwelt somewhere within the city boundaries had power to make a mooning idiot of him, he said to himself testily, then he had better get out, go somewhere, get down to work, be at his fixed purpose of proving his mettle upon an obdurate world, and get her out of his mind in the process. He couldn't tune his whole existence to a sentimental craving for any woman — even such a woman as Sophie. He would, in the moment of such emotional genuflexions, have dissented with cynical bitterness from the poetic dictum that it was better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

Spurred by this mood he acted instinctively rather than with reasoned purpose. He gave up his room, packed his clothes and betook himself upon a work-seeking pilgrimage among the small, interior towns.

He left San Francisco in March. By May he had circulated all through the lower San Joaquin and farther abroad to the San Juan, and had turned his face again toward San Francisco Bay. At various jobs he had tried his hand, making a living such as it was, acquiring in addition thereto a store of first-hand experience in the social and monetary values of itinerant labor. He conceded that such experience might

somehow be of use to a man. But he had had enough of it. He had a feeling of having tested California for his purposes — and of finding it wanting.

He had made up his mind to double on his tracks, to go north again, specifically to British Columbia, partly because Tommy was there, chiefly because Vancouver was a growing place on the edge of a vast, newly opened interior. He knew that if no greater thing offered, from that center there was always the avenue of the woods. He could qualify in that line. And in the woods even a common axeman exacted and received more democratic treatment than in this older region where industry ran in fixed channels, where class lines were more rigidly drawn, where common labor was cheap and unprivileged.

He hadn't been getting on in those three months. He had less money than when he started out — about enough now to get him up North and leave a hundred dollars or so for emergencies. No, decidedly he wasn't getting on — he was going down, he told himself. It dismayed him a little. It wasn't enough to be big and strong and willing. A mule could be that. The race was not to the swift or the strong. Not in modern industry, with its bewildering complexities. No, it fell to the trained, the specialist in knowledge, the man who could do something more efficiently, with greater precision than his fellows.

He could not do that — not yet. And so there was nothing in California for him, he decided. A man could no longer go West and grow up with the country — but he could go North.

Thompson was sitting on the border of a road that runs between San Mateo and the city when he definitely committed himself to doubling on his tracks, to counteracting the trick of fate which had sent him to a place where he did not wish to go. He was looking between the trees and out over an undulating valley floored with emerald fields, studded with oaks, backed by the bare Hamiltons to the east, and westward by the redwood-clad ruggedness of the Santa Cruz range. And he was not seeing this loveliness of landscape at all. He was looking far beyond and his eyes were full of miles upon miles of untrodden forest, the sanctuary of silence and furtive living things, of mountains that lifted snowy spires to heaven high over the glaciers that scarred their sides. And the smells that for a moment rose strongly in his nostrils were not the smells of palm and gum and poppy-dotted fields, but odors of pine and spruce and the smell of birchwood burning in campfires. He came out of that queer projection of mind into great distance with a slight shake of his head and a feeling of wonder. It had been very vivid. And it dawned upon him that for a minute he had grown sentimentally lonely for that grim, unconquered region where he had first learned the pangs of loneliness, where he had suffered in body and spirit until he had learned a lesson he would never forget while he lived.

The road itself, abutting upon stately homes and modest bungalows behind a leafy screen of Australian gums, ran straight as an arrow down the peninsula toward the city and the bay, a broad, smoothly as-

phalted highway upon that road where the feet of the Franciscan priests had traced the *Camino Real.* And down this highway both north and south there passed many motor cars swiftly and silently or with less speed and more noise, according to their quality and each driver's mood.

Thompson rested, watching them from the grassy level beneath a tree. He rather regretted now the impulse which had made him ship his bag and blanket roll from the last town, and undertake this solitary hike. He had merely humored a whim to walk through orchards and green fields in a leisurely fashion, to be a careless trudger for a day. True, he was saving car-fare, but he observed dryly that he was expending many dollars' worth of energy — to say nothing of shoe leather. The pleasure of walking, paradoxically, was best achieved by sitting still in the shade. A midday sun was softening the asphalt with its fierce blaze. He looked idly at passing machines and wondered what the occupants thereof would say if he halted one and demanded a ride. He smiled.

He stared after a passing sedan driven by a uniformed chauffeur, one half the rear seat occupied by a fat, complacent woman, the other half of the ten-inch upholstery given over to an equally fat and complacent bulldog. And while he reflected in some little amusement at the circumstance which gave a pampered animal the seat of honor in a six-thousand-dollar car and sent an able-bodied young man trudging down the road in the heat and the dust, another machine came humming up from the south.

It was a red car, crowding the state limit for speed, and it swept down on Thompson with a subdued purr like a great cat before a fire. When it was almost abreast of him there burst from it a crack like the report of a shotgun. There was just a perceptible wabble of the machine. Its hot pace slackened abruptly. It rolled past and came to a stop beside the road fifty yards along — a massive brute of a red roadster driven by a slim girl in a pongee suit, a girl whose bare head was bound about with heavy braids of corn-yellow hair.

Thompson half rose — then sank back in momentary indecision. Perhaps it were wiser to let sleeping dogs lie. Then he smiled at the incongruity of that proverb applied to Sophie Carr.

He sat watching the machine for a minute. The halting of its burst of speed was no mystery to Thompson. Miss Carr proceeded with calm deliberation. She first resurrected a Panama hat from somewhere in the seat beside her and pinned it atop of her head. Then she got out, walked around to the front wheel, poked it tentatively once or twice, and proceeded about the business of getting out a jack and a toolkit.

By the time Thompson decided that in common decency he should offer to lend a hand and thus was moved to rise and approach the disabled car she had the jack under the front axle and was applying a brace wrench to the rim bolts. But the rim bolts that hold on a five-inch tire are not designed to unscrew too easily. Sophie had started one with an earnest tug and was twisting stoutly at the second when he reached

her. He knew by the impersonal glance she gave him that he was to her merely a casual stranger.

"May I help you?" he said politely. "A big tire is rather hard to handle."

Sophie bestowed another level look upon him as she straightened up from her task. A puzzled expression showed briefly in her gray eyes. But she handed him the wrench without parley.

"Thanks, if you will," she said. "These rim bolts are fearfully stiff. I daresay I could manage it though. I've done it on a lighter car. But it's a man's job, really."

Thompson laid off his coat and set to work silently, withholding speech for a double reason. He could not trust his tongue, and he was not given to inconsequential chatter. If she did not recognize him — well, there was no good reason why she should remember, if she chose not to remember. He could lend a hand and go his way, just as he would have been moved to lend a hand to any one in like difficulty.

He twisted out the bolt-heads, turned the lugs, pulled the rim clear of the wheel. He stood up to get the spare tire from its place behind. And he caught Sophie staring at him, astonishment, surprise, inquiry all blended in one frank stare. But still she did not speak.

He trundled the blow-out casing to the rear, took off the one ready inflated, and speedily had it fast in its appointed position on the wheel.

And still Sophie Carr did not speak. She leaned against the car body. He felt her eyes upon him, ques-

tioning, appraising, critical, while he released the jack, gathered up the tools, and tied them up in the roll on the running board.

"There you are," he found himself facing her, his tongue giving off commonplace statements, while his heart thumped heavily in his breast. "Ready for the road again."

"Do you remember what Donald Lachlan used to say?" Sophie answered irrelevantly. "Long time I see you no. Eh, Mr. Thompson?"

She held out one gloved hand with just the faintest suggestion of a smile hovering about her mouth. Thompson's work-roughened fingers closed over her small soft hand. He towered over her, looking down wistfully.

"I didn't think you knew me," he muttered.

Sophie laughed. The smile expanded roguishly. The old, quizzical twinkle flickered in her eyes.

"You must think my memory poor," she replied. "You're not one of the peas in a pod, you know. I knew you, and still I wasn't sure. It seemed scarcely possible. It's a long, long way from the Santa Clara Valley to Lone Moose."

"Yes," he answered calmly. "A long way — the way I came."

"In a purely geographical sense?"

Her voice was tinged with gentle raillery.

"Perhaps," he answered noncommittally.

It dawned upon him that for all his gladness to see her — and he was glad — he nursed a tiny flame of resentment. He had come a long way measured on the

map, and a far greater distance measured in human experience, in spiritual reckoning. If the old narrow faith had failed him he felt that slowly and surely he was acquiring a faith that would not fail him, because it was based on a common need of mankind. But he was still sure there must be a wide divergence in their outlook. He was getting his worldly experience, his knowledge of material factors, of men's souls and faiths and follies and ideals and weaknesses in a rude school at first hand — and Sophie had got hers out of books and logical deductions from critically assembled fact. There was a difference in the two processes. He knew, because he had tried both. And where the world at large faced him, and must continue to face him, like an enemy position, something to be stormed, very likely with fierce fighting, for Sophie Carr it had all been made easy.

So he did not follow up that conversational lead. He was not going to bare his soul offhand to gratify any woman's curiosity. It would be very easy to make a blithering ass of himself again — with her — because of her. Already he was on his guard against that. His pride was alert.

Sophie stowed the canvas tool roll under the seat cushion. She climbed to her seat behind the steering column and turned to Thompson.

"Which way are you bound?" she asked. "I'll give you a lift, and we can talk."

"I'm on my way to San Francisco," he said. "But time is no object in my young life right now, or I'd take the Interurban instead of walking. It would be

demoralizing to me, I'm afraid, to whiz down these roads in a machine like this."

Sophie shoved the opposite door open.

"Get in," she let a flavor of reproof creep into her tone. "Don't talk that sort of nonsense."

Thompson hesitated. He was suddenly uncomfortable, conscious of his dusty clothes somewhat the worse for wear, his shoes from which the pristine freshness had long vanished, the day-old stubble on his chin. There was a depressing contrast between his outward condition and that of the smartly dressed girl whose gray eyes were resting curiously on him now.

"Do you make a practice of picking up tramps along the road?" he parried with an effort at lightness. He wanted to refuse outright, yet could not utter the words. "I'm not very presentable."

"Get in. Don't be silly," she said impatiently. "You don't think I've become a snob just because chance has pitchforked me into the ranks of the idle rich, do you?"

Thompson laughed awkwardly. There was real feeling in her tone, as if she had read correctly his hesitation and resented it. After all, why not? It would merely be an incident to Sophie Carr, and it would save him some hot and dusty miles. He got in.

"I'm quite curious to know where you've been and what you've been doing for the last year," she said, when the red car was once more rolling toward the city at a sedate pace. "And by the way, where did you learn to change a tire so smartly?"

"My last job," Thompson told her truthfully, "was

washing cars, greasing up, and changing tires in a country garage down in the San Juan." He paused for a moment. "Before that I was chaperon to a stable full of horses on a Salinas ranch. I've tried being a carpenter's helper, an assistant gardener, understudy to a suburban plumber — and other things too numerous to mention — in the last three months. I think the most satisfactory thing I've tackled was the woods up north, last fall."

"You must have acquired experience, at least, even if none of those things proved an efficient method of making money," she returned lightly.

"A man like me," he remarked, "has first to learn how to make a living before he can set about making money."

"Making money is relative. Quite often it merely means making a living with an extended horizon," she observed. "I know a man with a ten-thousand-dollar salary who finds it a living, no more."

"Poor devil," he drawled sardonically. "When I get into the ten-thousand-a-year class I rather think it will afford me a few trifles beyond bare subsistence."

She smiled.

"Have you set that for a mark to shoot at?"

"I haven't set any limit," he replied. "I haven't got my sights adjusted yet."

"I can scarcely assure myself that you are really you," she said after a momentary silence. "I can't seem to disassociate you with Lone Moose and a blundering optimism, a mystical faith that the Lord would make things come out right if you only leaned on Him

hard enough. Now your talk is flavored with both egotism and the bitterness of the cynic."

"How should a man talk?" he demanded. "Like a worm if he chance to be trodden on a few times? Does a man necessarily become cynical when he realizes that plugging from the bottom up is no child's play? As for egotism — Heaven knows you knocked that out of me pretty effectually when you left Lone Moose. You made me feel like a whipped puppy for months. I chucked myself out of the church because of that — that abased, disheartened feeling. For a year and a half I've been learning and discovering that life isn't a parlor game. Do you remember that letter you left with Cloudy Moon for me? I need only to recall a phrase here and there in that as a cure for incipient egotism. What do you think I should have become?" he flung at her, unconscious of the passion in his voice. "A poor thing glad of a ride in your car? Or a confirmed optimist in overalls?"

Sophie gave him a queer sidelong glance.

"Can't you let the dead past bury its dead?" she asked quietly.

Thompson kept his eyes on the smooth, green-bordered road for a minute. The quick wave of feeling passed. He stifled it — indeed, felt ashamed for letting it briefly master him.

"Of course," he answered at last, and turned to her with a friendly quirk of his lips. "It is buried pretty deep one way and another, isn't it? And it would hardly be decent to exhume the remains. Shall we talk about the weather?"

"Don't be sarcastic," she reproved gently. "Save that to cope with dad. He'll relish it coming from you."

"I don't know," Thompson said thoughtfully. "I wouldn't mind a chat with your father. We wouldn't agree on many things, by a good way, although I've discovered that some of his philosophy is sound enough. But I've got to make a move, and I'm so situated that I must make it quickly or not at all. I'm going to take the first north-bound steamer out of San Francisco. So I don't imagine Mr. Carr will have a chance at me soon."

"Oh, yes, he will," Sophie asserted confidently. "In about twenty minutes."

Thompson looked at her, startled a little by this bland assertion.

"We'll be home in about twenty minutes," she explained.

"But I'm — why take the trouble?" he asked bluntly. "I'm out of your orbit entirely. Or do you want to exhibit me as a horrible example?"

"You're downright rude," she laughed. "Or you would be if you were serious. Do you mind coming to see dad? And I'd like to hear more about your trip across the mountains with Tommy Ashe."

Thompson pricked up his ears.

"Oh, you know about that, eh?" he remarked. "How —"

"Not as much as I'd like to," she interrupted. "Will you come?"

"Yes," he agreed. "But give a fellow a chance.

Don't drag me into your home looking like this. I'm not vain, but I'd feel more comfortable in clean clothes. I shipped all my things into town. They should be in the express office now. I'll come this afternoon or this evening, whichever you say. Drop me off at the first carline."

"I'll do better than that," she declared. "I'll drive you down-town myself."

"But it isn't necessary," he persisted. "I don't want to take up all your time, and —"

"For the rest of this day," Sophie murmured, "I have absolutely nothing to do but kill time. I get restless, and being out in the car cures that feeling. Do you mind if I chauff you a few miles more or less? Don't be ungallant. I love to drive."

"Oh, well."

Thompson mentally threw up his hands. In that gracious mood Sophie was irresistible. He sank back in the thick, resilient upholstery and resolved to take what the gods provided — to dance as it were, and reckon with the piper when he presented his bill.

CHAPTER XVII

THE REPROOF COURTEOUS (?)

For the few minutes it took the red roadster to slip under the green summits of Twin Peaks and by a maze of boulevards debouch at length upon Valencia and so into the busy length of Market Street their talk ran to commonplaces. Thompson placed himself unreservedly in Sophie's hands. He had to reach an express office on lower Market, get his things, and proceed thence to the house where he had roomed all winter. Since it suited Miss Carr's book to convey him to the first point, he accepted the gift of her company gladly. So in the fullness of time they came into the downtown press of traffic, among which, he observed, Sophie steered her machine like a veteran.

At Third and Market the traffic whistle blocked them with the front wheels over the safety line that guided the flow of cross-street pedestrians, and the point man, crabbed perhaps from a long trick amidst that roaring maze of vehicles, motioned autocratically for her to back up.

Sophie muttered impatiently under her breath and went into reverse. Behind her the traffic was piling up, each machine stealing every inch of vantage for the go-ahead signal, crowding up wheel to wheel, the nose

of one thrusting at the rear fender of the other. On one side of Sophie rose the base of a safety station for street-car boarders. Between her car and the curb a long-snouted gray touring-car was edging in. And as she backed under the imperative command of the traffic officer, one rear hub clinked against the hind fender of the other, jarring both cars a little, dinting the gray one's fender, marring the glossy finish.

A chauffeur in a peaked cap drove the gray machine. He looked across at Sophie, scowling. He was young and red-faced, a pugnacious-looking individual.

"Back to the country, Jane, an' practice on the farm wagon," he snarled out of one corner of his mouth. "Yuh drive like a hick, yuh do."

"Talk civil to a woman," Thompson snapped back at him, "or keep your mouth shut."

The chauffeur bestowed upon him a rancorous glare. His sharp, ferret eyes gleamed. Then he deliberately spat upon the impeccably shining red hood of Sophie's roadster.

A scant arm's length separated him from Thompson. Thompson bridged that gap with his feet still on the running-board of the roadster. He moved so quickly that the chauffeur had no chance. He did try to slide out from behind the wheel and his fist doubled and drew back, but Thompson's work-hardened fingers closed about his neck, and the powerful arms back of those clutching hands twisted the man out of all position to strike any sort of blow. He yanked the chauffeur's head out over the side of the car, struck him one open-handed slap that was like an earnest cluff from a

sizable bear, lifted again and banged the man's face down on the controls on his wheels, then pushed him back into his seat, limp and disheveled, all the insolent defiance knocked out of him.

Thompson stood on the running board, panting a little, the blaze of a quick anger bright in his blue eyes, and he became aware of two men in the rear seat of the gray car, gazing at him in open-mouthed astonishment. One was fat and long past forty, well fed, well dressed, a prosperous citizen. The other was a slim youngster in the early twenties, astonishingly like his older companion as to feature.

Thompson looked at them, and back at the cowed driver who was feeling his neck and face with shaky fingers. Just then three things happened — simultaneously. The traffic whistle blew. The younger man opened his mouth and uttered, "I say —" Sophie plucked at Thompson's arm, crying "Sit down, sit down."

Thompson was still fumbling the catch on the door when they swept over the cross street and raced down the next block. He looked back. The gray car was hidden somewhere in a rolling phalanx of other motors. The traffic had split and flowed about and past it, stalled there doubtless while the red-faced chauffeur wiped the blood out of his eyes and wondered if a street car had struck him.

"Do you habitually reprove ill-bred persons in that vigorous manner?"

He became aware of Sophie speaking. He looked at her. So far as he could gather from her profile she

was quite unperturbed, making her way among the traffic that is always like a troubled sea between Third and the Ferry Building.

"No," he replied diffidently. "I daresay I'd be in jail or the hospital most of the time if I did. Still, that was rather a rank case. I'm not sorry I bumped him. He'll be civil to the next woman he meets."

What he did not attempt to explain to Sophie, a matter he scarcely fathomed himself, was his precipitancy, this going off "half-cocked", as he put it. He wasn't given to quick bursts of temper. It was as if he had been holding himself in and the self-contained pressure had grown acute when the insolent chauffeur presented himself as a relief valve. He felt a little ashamed now.

Sophie swung the roadster in to the curb before the express office. Thompson got out.

"Good-by till this evening, then," he said. "I'll be there if the police don't get me."

"If they do," she smiled, "telephone and dad will come down and bail you out. Good-by, Mr. Thompson."

Ten minutes or so later he emerged from the express office with a suitcase, a canvas bag, and a roll of blankets. He had no false pride about people seeing him with his worldly goods upon his back, so to speak, wherefore he crossed the street and trudged half a block to a corner where he could catch a car that would carry him out Market to his old rooming place.

And, since this was a day in which events trod upon each other's heels to reach him, it befell that as he

loitered on the curb a gray touring car rolled up, stopped, and a short, stout man emerging therefrom disappeared hurriedly within the portals of an office building. Thompson's gaze rested speculatively on the machine. Gray cars were common enough. But without a doubt this was the same vehicle. The chauffeur in the peaked cap was not among those present — but Thompson could take oath on the other two. The young man sat behind the steering wheel.

He, too, it presently transpired, was spurred by recognition. His roving eyes alighted upon Thompson with a reminiscent gleam. He edged over in his seat. Thompson stood almost at the front fender.

"I say," the man in the car addressed him bluntly, "weren't you in a red roadster back at Third and Market about fifteen or twenty minutes ago?"

"I was," Thompson admitted.

Was he to be arrested forthwith on a charge of assault and battery? Policemen were plentiful enough in that quarter. All one had to do was crook his finger. People could not be expected to take kindly to having their chauffeur mauled and disabled like that. But Thompson stood his ground indifferently.

"Well, I must say," the young man drawled, producing a cigarette case as he spoke, "you squashed Pebbles with neatness and despatch, and Pebbles was supposed to be some scrapper, too. What do you weigh?"

Thompson laughed outright. He had expected a complaint, perhaps prosecution. He was handed a compliment.

"I don't know," he smiled. "About a hundred and eighty-five, I think."

"You must be pretty fit to handle a man like that," the other observed. "The beggar had it coming, all right. He gets an overnight jag, and is surly all the next day. I was going to apologize to the lady, but you were too quick for me. By the way, are you a working-man — or a capitalist in disguise?"

Before Thompson quite decided how he should answer this astonishingly personal inquiry, the young man's companion strode out of the lobby and entered the car. At least he had his hand on the open door and one foot on the running board. And there he halted and turned about at something his son said — Thompson assumed they were father and son. The likeness of feature was too well-defined to permit of any lesser relation.

The older man took his foot off the running board, and made a deliberate survey of Thompson.

"Just a second, Fred," he muttered, and took a step toward Thompson. His eyes traveled swiftly from Thompson's face down over the suitcase and blanket roll, and came back to that deliberate matching of glances.

"Do you happen to be looking for a position that requires energy, ability, and a fair command of the English language?" he demanded abruptly.

"Yes," Thompson answered briefly.

He wondered what was coming. Were they going to offer him the chauffeur's job? Did they require a bruiser to drive the gray car?

"Know anything about motors?"

"Not the first principles, even." Thompson declared himself frankly. He did possess a little such knowledge, but held a little knowledge to be a dangerous admission.

"So much the better," the stout man commented.

He fished out a cardcase, and handed his card to Thompson.

"Call on me at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," he said briskly. "I'll make you a proposition."

He did not permit inquiry into his motive or anything else, in fact, for he got quickly into the car and it started off instantly, leaving Mr. Wesley Thompson, a little bewildered by the rapidity of these proceedings, staring at the card, which read:

JOHN P. HENDERSON, INC.

Van Ness at Potter Groya Motors

A westbound street car bore down on the corner. Thompson gave over reflecting upon this latest turn of affairs, gathered up his things, boarded the car, and was set off a few minutes later near the Globe Rooms.

At precisely 8 P. M. he arrived at the address Sophie had given him and found it to be an apartment house covering half a block, an enormous structure clinging upon the slope which dips from Nob Hill down to the heart of the city. An elevator shot him silently aloft to the fifth floor. As silently the elevator man indicated the location of Apartment 509. The whole place seemed pitched to that subdued note, as if it were a sanctuary from the clash and clamor without its walls.

Thompson walked down a hushed corridor over a velvet carpet that muffled his footfalls and so came at last to the proper door, where he pressed a black button in the center of a brass plate. The door opened almost upon the instant. A maid eyed him interrogatively. He mentioned his name.

"Oh yes," the maid answered. "This way, please."

She relieved him of his hat and led him down a short, dusky hall into a bright-windowed room, in which, from the depths of two capacious leather chairs, Sophie and her father rose to greet him.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. HENDERSON'S PROPOSITION

Late that evening Thompson walked into his room at the Globe. He seated himself in a rickety chair under a fly-specked incandescent lamp, beside a bed that was clean and comfortable if neither stylish nor massive. Over against the opposite wall stood a dresser which had suffered at the hands of many lodgers. Altogether it was a cheap and cheerless abode, a place where a man was protected from the weather, where he could lie down and sleep. That was all.

Thompson smiled sardonically. With hands clasped behind his head he surveyed the room deliberately, and the survey failed to please him.

"Hell," he exploded suddenly. "I'd ten times rather be out in the woods with a tent than have to live like this — always."

He had spent a pleasant three hours in surroundings that approximated luxury. He had been graciously received and entertained. However, it was easy to be gracious and entertaining when one had the proper setting. A seven-room suite and two servants were highly desirable from certain angles. Oh, well — what the devil was the difference!

Thompson threw off his clothes and got into bed. But he could not escape insistent thought. Against his

dull walls, on which the street light cast queer patterns through an open window, he could see, through drowsy eyes, Sophie half-buried in a great chair, listening attentively while he and her father talked. Of course they had fallen into argument, sometimes triangular, more often solely confined to himself and Carr. Thompson was glad that the Grant Street orators had driven him to the city library that winter. A man needed all the weapons he could command against that sharp-tongued old student who precipitated himself joyfully into controversy.

But of course they did not spend three hours discussing abstract theories. There was a good deal of the personal. Thompson had learned that they were in San Francisco for the winter only. Their home was in Vancouver. And Tommy Ashe was still in Vancouver, graduated from an automobile salesman to an agency of his own, and doing well in the venture. Tommy, Carr said, had the modern business instinct. He did not specify what that meant. Carr did not dwell much on Tommy. He appeared to be much more interested in Thompson's wanderings, his experiences, the shifts he had been put to, how the world impressed him, viewed from the angle of the ordinary man instead of the ministerial.

"If you wish to achieve success as modern society defines success, you've been going at it all wrong," he remarked sagely. "The big rewards do not lie in producing and creating, but in handling the results of creation and production — at least so it seems to me. Get hold of something the public wants, Thompson, and

sell it to them. Or evolve a sure method of making big business bigger. They'll fall on your neck and fill your pockets with money if you can do that. Profitable undertakings — that's the ticket. Anybody can work at a job."

That sounded rather cynical and Thompson said so. Carr laughed genially. One couldn't escape obvious conclusions, he declared. Perhaps youth and enthusiasm saw it differently.

Thompson, through sleep-heavy eyes, saw Carr hold a glass of port wine, glowing like a ruby, up between himself and the light and sip it slowly. Carr was partial to that wine. Wonder if the old chap didn't get properly lit up sometimes? He looked as if — well, as if he enjoyed easy living — easy drinking. There was brandy and soda and a bottle of Scotch on the sideboard too. — And Sophie *was* beautiful. All the little feminine artifices of civilization accentuated the charm that had been potent enough in the woods. Silk instead of gingham. Dainty shoes instead of buckskin moccasins. — What an Aladdin's lamp money was, anyway. Funny that they had settled upon Vancouver for a home. Tommy was there too. Of course. Should a fellow stick to his hunch? Vancouver might give birth to an opportunity. Profitable undertakings. — At any rate he would see her now and then. But would he — working? Did he want to? Would a cat continue to stare at a king if the king's crown rather dazzled the cat's eyes? Suppose — just suppose —

Thompson sat up in bed with a start. It seemed to

him that he had just lain down, that the train of his thought was still racing. But it was broad day, a dull morning, gloomy with that high fog which in spring often rides over the city and the bay till near noon.

He stretched his arms, yawning. All at once he recollected that he had something to do, a call to make upon Mr. John P. Henderson at ten o'clock. Groya Motors — he wondered what significance that held. At any rate he proposed to see.

It lacked just forty minutes of the appointed time. Thompson bounced out of bed. Within twenty minutes he had swallowed a cup of coffee at a near-by lunch counter and was on his way up Van Ness.

The corner of Van Ness and Potter revealed a six-story concrete building, its plate-glass frontage upon the sidewalk displaying three or four beautifully finished automobiles upon a polished oak floor. The sign across the front bore the heraldry of the card. He walked in, accosted the first man he saw, and was waved to a flight of stairs reaching a mezzanine floor. Gaining that he discovered in a short corridor a door bearing upon its name-plate the legend:

Mr. John P. Henderson.

PRIVATE.

Thompson looked at his watch. It lacked but two minutes of ten. He knocked, and a voice bade him enter. He found himself face to face with the master of the gray car. Mr. John P. Henderson looked more

imposing behind a mahogany desk than he did on the street. He had a heavy jaw and a forehead-crinkling way of looking at a man. And — although Thompson knew nothing of the fact and at the moment would not have cared a whoop — John P. was just about the biggest toad in San Francisco's automobile puddle. He had started in business on little but his nerve and made himself a fortune. It was being whispered along the Row that John P. was organizing to manufacture cars as well as sell them — and that was a long look ahead for the Pacific coast.

He nodded to Thompson, bade him be seated. And Thompson sank into a chair, facing John P. across the desk. He wanted nothing, expected nothing. He was simply smitten with a human curiosity to know what this stout, successful man of affairs had to propose to him.

"My name is Thompson," he stated cheerfully. "It is ten o'clock. I have called — as you suggested."

Henderson smiled.

"I have been accused of hastiness in my judgment of men, but it is admitted that I seldom make mistakes," he said complacently. "In this organization there is always a place for able, aggressive young men. Some men have ability without any force. Some men are aggressive with no ability whatever. How about you? Think you could sell motor-cars?"

"How the deuce do I know?" Thompson replied frankly. "I have never tried. I'm handicapped to begin. I know nothing about either cars or salesmanship."

"Would you like to try?"

Thompson considered a minute.

"Yes," he declared. "I've tried several things. I'm willing to try anything once. Only I do not see how I can qualify."

"We'll see about that," John P.'s eyes kept boring into him. "D'ye mind a personal question or two?"

Thompson shook his head.

He did not quite know how it came about, but he passed under Henderson's deft touch from reply to narration, and within twenty minutes had sketched briefly his whole career.

Henderson sat tapping the blotter on his desk with a pencil for a silent minute.

"You have nothing to unlearn," he announced abruptly. "All big commercial organizations must to a certain extent train their own men. A man who appears to possess fundamental qualifications is worth his training. I have done it repeatedly. I am going to proceed on the assumption that you will become a useful member of my staff, ultimately with much profit to yourself. I propose that you apply yourself diligently to mastering the sale of motor cars to individual purchasers. I shall pay you twenty-five dollars a week to begin. That's a mechanic's wages. If you make good on sales — there's no limit to your earning power."

"But, look here," Thompson made honest objection. "I appreciate the opportunity. At the same time I wonder if you realize what a lot I have to learn. I don't know a thing about cars beyond how to change a tire and fill grease cups. I've never driven, never even

started a motor. How can I sell cars unless I know cars?"

"You overestimate your handicap," John P. smiled. "Knowing how to build and repair cars and knowing how to sell cars are two entirely different propositions. The first requires a high degree of technical knowledge and a lot of practical experience. Selling is a matter of personality — of the power to convince. You can learn to drive in two or three days. In a month you will handle a machine as well as the other fellow, and you will learn enough about the principal parts and their functions — not only of our line, but of other standard machines — to enable you to discuss and compare them intelligently. The rest will depend upon a quality within yourself that has nothing to do with the mechanical end."

"You should know." Thompson could not help a shade of doubt in his tone. "But I must say I could approach a man with a proposition to sell him an article with more confidence if I knew that article inside and out, top and bottom. If I really knew a thing was good, and *why*, I could sell it, I believe."

"He has the right hunch, Dad."

Thompson had not heard young Henderson come in. He saw him now a step behind his chair, garbed in overalls that bore every sign of intimate contact with machinery.

He nodded to Thompson and continued to address his father.

"It's true. Take two men of equal selling force. On the year's business the one who can drive mechan-

ical superiority home because he knows wherein it lies will show the biggest sales, and the most satisfied customers. I believe six months' shop work would just about double the efficiency of half our sales staff."

John P. gazed good-naturedly at his son.

"I know, Fred," he drawled. "I've heard those sentiments before. There's some truth in it, of course. But Simons and Sam Eppel and Monk White are products of *my* method. You cannot deny their efficiency in sales. What's the idea, anyway?"

Young Henderson grinned.

"The fact is," he said, "since I listened in on this conversation I have come to the conclusion that you've good material here. I need a helper. He'll get a thorough grounding. Whenever you and he decide that he has absorbed sufficient mechanics he can join the sales end. I'd like to train one man for you, properly."

"Well," John P. remarked judicially, "I can't waste the whole morning discussing methods of training salesmen in the way they should go. I've made Mr. Thompson a proposition. What do you say?"

He turned abruptly on Thompson.

"Or," young Henderson cut in. "You have the counter proposition of an indefinite mechanical grind in my department — which is largely experimental. If you take to it at all I guarantee that in six months you will know more about the internal combustion motor and automobile design in general than any two salesmen on my father's staff. And that," he added, with a boyish grimace at his father, "is saying a lot."

It seemed to Thompson that both men regarded him

with a considerable expectancy. It perplexed him, that embarrassment of opportunity. He was a little dazed at the double chance. Here was Opportunity clutching him by the coat collar. He had nothing but impulse, and perhaps a natural craving for positive knowledge, to guide his choice. He wasted few seconds, however, in deciding. Among other things, he had outgrown vacillation.

"It is just as I said," he addressed Henderson senior. "I'd feel more competent to sell cars if I knew them. I'd rather start in the shop."

"All right," Henderson grunted. "You're the doctor. Be giving Fred a chance to prove one of his theories. Personally I believe you'd make a go of selling right off the bat, and a good salesman is wasted in the mechanical line. When you feel that you've saturated your system with valve clearances and compression formulas and gear ratios and all the rest of the shop dope, come and see me. I'll give you a try-out on the selling end. For the present, report to Fred."

He reached for some papers on the desk. His manner, no less than his words, ended the interview. Thompson rose.

"When can you start in?" young Henderson inquired.

"Any time," Thompson responded quickly. He was, in truth, a trifle eager to see what made the wheels go round in that establishment. "I only have to change my clothes."

"Come after lunch then," young Henderson suggested. "Take the elevator to the top floor. Ask

one of the men where you'll find me. Bring your overalls with you. We have a dressing room and lockers on each floor."

He nodded good-by and turned to his father. Thompson made his exit.

Half a block away he turned to look back at the house of Henderson. It was massive, imposing, the visible sign of a prosperous concern, the manifestation of business on a big scale. Groya Motors, Inc. It was lettered in neat gilt across the front. It stood forth in four-foot skeleton characters atop of the flat roof — an electric sign to burn like a beacon by night. And he was about to become a part of that establishment, a humble beginner, true, but a beginner with uncommon prospects. He wondered if Henderson senior was right, if there resided in him that elusive essence which leads some men to success in dealings with other men. He was not sure about it himself. Still, the matter was untried. Henderson might be right.

But it was all a fluke. It seemed to him he was getting an entirely disproportionate reward for mauling an insolent chauffeur. That moved him to wonder what became of Pebbles. He felt sorry for Pebbles. The man had probably lost his job for good measure. Poor devil!

As he walked his thought short-circuited to Sophie Carr. Whereat he turned into a drugstore containing a telephone booth and rang her up.

Sophie herself answered.

"I guess my saying good-by last night was a little premature," he told her. "I'm not going north after

all. In fact, if things go on all right I may be in San Francisco indefinitely. I've got a job."

"What sort of a job?" Sophie inquired.

He hadn't told her about the ten o'clock appointment with Henderson. Nor did he go into that now.

"I've been taken on in an automobile plant on Van Ness," he said. "A streak of real luck. I'm to have a chance to learn the business. So I won't see you in Vancouver. Remember me to Tommy. I suppose you'll be busy getting ready to go, so I'll wish you a pleasant voyage."

"Thanks," she answered. "Wouldn't it be more appropriate if you wished that on us in person before we sail?"

"I don't know," he mumbled. "I —"

A perfectly mad impulse seized him.

"Sophie," he said sharply into the receiver.

"Yes."

He heard the quick intake of her breath at the other end, almost a gasp. And the single word was slightly uncertain.

"What did you mean by a man standing on his own feet?"

She did not apparently have a ready answer. He pictured her, receiver in hand, and he did not know if she were startled, or surprised — or merely amused. That last was intolerable. And suddenly he felt like a fool. Before that soft, sweet voice could lead him into further masculine folly he hung up and walked out of the booth. For the next twenty minutes his opinion of John P. Henderson's judgment of men was rather

low. He did not feel himself to be an individual with any force of character. In homely language he said to himself that he, Wesley Thompson, was nothing but a pot of mush.

However, there in the offing loomed the job. He turned into the first clothing store he found, and purchased one of those all-covering duck garments affected by motor-car workers. By that time he had recovered sufficiently to note that an emotional disturbance does not always destroy a man's appetite for food.

CHAPTER XIX

A WIDENING HORIZON

This is not a history of the motor car business, nor even of the successive steps Wes Thompson took to win competent knowledge of that Beanstalk among modern industries. If it were there might be sound reasons for recounting the details of his tutelage under Fred Henderson. No man ever won success without knowing pretty well what he was about. No one is born with a workable fund of knowledge. It must be acquired.

That, precisely, is what Thompson set out to do in the Groya shop. In which purpose he was aided, abetted, and diligently coached by Fred Henderson. The measure of Thompson's success in this endeavor may be gauged by what young Henderson said casually to his father on a day some six months later.

"Thompson soaks up mechanical theory and practice as a dry sponge soaks up water."

"Wasted talent," John P. rumbled. "I suppose you'll have him a wild-eyed designer before you're through."

"No," Henderson junior observed thoughtfully. "He'll never design. But he will know design when he sees it. Thompson is learning for a definite purpose — to sell cars — to make money. Knowing motor cars thoroughly is incidental to his main object."

John P. cocked his ears.

"Yes," he said. "That so? Better send that young man up to me, Fred."

"I've been expecting that," young Henderson replied. "He's ripe. I wish you hadn't put that sales bug in his ear to start with. He'd make just the man I need for an understudy when we get that Oakland plant going."

"Tush," Henderson snorted inelegantly. "Salesmen are born, not made — the real high-grade ones. And the factories are turning out mechanical experts by the gross."

"I know that," his son grinned. "But I like Thompson. He gives you the feeling that you can absolutely rely on him."

"Send him up to me," John P. repeated — and when John P. issued a fiat like that, even his son did not dispute it.

And Thompson was duly sent up. He did not go back to the shop on the top floor where for six months he had been an eager student, where he had learned something of the labor of creation — for Fred Henderson was evolving a new car, a model that should have embodied in it power and looks and comfort at the minimum of cost. And in pursuance of that ideal he built and discarded, redesigned and rebuilt, putting his motors to the acid test on the block and his assembled chassis on the road. Indeed, many a wild ride he and Thompson had taken together on quiet highways outside of San Francisco during that testing process.

No, Thompson never went back to that after his

interview with John P. Henderson. He was sorry, in a way. He liked the work. It was fascinating to put shafting and gears and a motor and a set of insentient wheels together and make the assembled whole a thing of pulsing power that leaped under the touch of a finger. But — a good salesman made thousands where a good mechanic made hundreds. And money was the indispensable factor — to such as he, who had none.

Fred Henderson had the satisfaction of seeing his theory verified. Thompson made good from the start. In three months his sales were second in volume only to Monk White, who was John P.'s one best bet in the selling line. Henderson chuckled afresh over this verification of his original estimate of a man, and Fred Henderson smiled and said nothing. From either man's standpoint Wes Thompson was a credit to the house. An asset, besides, of reckonable value in cold cash.

"New blood counts," John P. rumbled in confidence to his son. "Keeps us from going stale, Fred."

When a twelvemonth had elapsed from the day Sophie Carr's red roadster blew a tire on the San Mateo road and set up that sequence of events which had landed him where he was, Thompson had left his hall bedroom at the Globe for quarters in a decent bachelor apartment. He had a well-stocked wardrobe, a dozen shelves of miscellaneous books, and three thousand dollars in the bank. Considering his prospects he should have been a fairly sanguine and well-contented young man.

As a matter of fact he had become so, within certain limits. A man whose time is continuously and prof-

itably occupied does not brood. Thompson had found a personal satisfaction in living up to John P. Henderson's first judgment of him. Through Fred Henderson and through his business activities he had formed a little group of pleasant acquaintances. Sophie Carr was growing shadowy — a shadow that sometimes laid upon him certain regrets, it is true, but the mere memory of her no longer produced the old overpowering reactions, the sense of sorry failure, of a dear treasure lost because he lacked a man's full stature in all but physical bulk.

It could easily have happened that Thompson would have embraced with enthusiasm a future bounded by San Francisco, a future in which he would successfully sell Groya cars until his amassed funds enabled him to expand still further his material success. If that future embraced a comfortable home, if a mate and affection suggested themselves as possibilities well within his reach, the basis of those tentative yearnings rested upon the need that dwells within every normal human being, and upon what he saw happening now and then to other young men — and young women — within the immediate radius of his observation.

But upon this particular May morning his mind was questing far afield. The prime cause of that mental projection was a letter in his hand, a letter from Tommy Ashe. Thompson had a lively imagination, tempered by the sort of worldly experience no moderately successful man can escape. And Tommy's letter — the latest in a series of renewed correspondence — opened up certain desirable eventualities. The first page of

Tommy's screed was devoted to personal matters. The rest ran thus:

Candidly, old man, your description of the contemplated Henderson car makes a hit with me. The line I handle now is a fair seller. But fair isn't good enough for me. I really need — in addition — to have a smaller machine, to supply a pretty numerous class of prospects. I should like to get hold of just such a car as you describe. I am feeling around for the agency of a small, *good* car. Send me all the dope on this one, and when it will be on the market. There is a tremendous market here for something like that. I'd prefer to take up a line with an established reputation behind it. But the main thing is to have a car that will sell when you push it. And this listens good.

Aren't you about due for a vacation? Why don't you take a run up here? I'd enjoy a chin-fest. The fishing's good, too — and we are long on rather striking scenery. Do come up for a week, when you can get off. Meantime, by-by.

TOMMY

Thompson laid down the letter and stared out over the roof-tops. He couldn't afford to be a philanthropist. A rather sweeping idea had flashed into his mind as he read that missive. His horizon was continually expanding. Money, beyond cavil, was the key to many doors, a necessity if a man's eyes were fixed upon much that was desirable. If he could make money selling machines for Groya Motors Inc., why not for himself? Why not?

The answer seemed too obvious for argument. The new car which had taken final form in Fred Henderson's

drafting room and in the Groya shop was long past the experimental stage. All it required was financing and John P. Henderson had attended efficiently to that. There was a plant rising swiftly across the bay, a modern plant with railway service, big yards, and a testing track, in which six months hence would begin an estimated annual production of ten thousand cars a year. John P. had remarked once to his son that for the Henderson family to design, produce, manufacture and market successfully a car they could be proud of would be the summit of his ambition. And the new car was named the Summit.

It was a good car, a quality car in everything but sheer bulk. Thompson knew that. He knew, too, that people were buying motor cars on performance, not poundage, now. He knew too that he could sell Summits — if he could get territory in which to make sales.

He had thought about this before. He knew that in the Groya files lay dealers' contracts covering the cream of California, Oregon and Washington. These dealers would handle Summits. There had not seemed an opening wide enough to justify plans. But now Tommy's letter focussed his vision upon a specific point.

If he could get that Vancouver territory! Vancouver housed a hundred thousand people. A Vancouver agency for the Summit, with a live man at the helm, would run to big figures.

No, he decided, he would not hastily grasp his fountain pen and say to Tommy Ashe, " Jump in and contract for territory and allotment, old boy. The Sum-

mit is the goods." Not until he had looked over the ground himself.

He had two weeks' vacation due when it pleased him. And it pleased him to ask John P. as soon as he reached the office that very morning if it was convenient to the firm to do without him for the ensuing fortnight.

CHAPTER XX

THE SHADOW

Thompson went to Vancouver to spy out the land. He made no confidants. He went about the Terminal City with his mouth shut and his ears and eyes open. What he saw and heard soon convinced him that like the Israelites of old he stood upon the border of a land which — for his business purpose — flowed with milk and honey. It was easy to weave air castles. He could visualize a future for himself in Vancouver that loomed big — if he could but make the proper arrangements at the other end; that is to say, with Mr. John P. Henderson, President of the Summit Motors Corporation. Thompson had faith enough in himself to believe he could make such an arrangement, daring as it seemed when he got down to actual figures.

It gave him a curious sense of relief to find Tommy Ashe flirting with the Petit Six people, apparently forgetful of the Summit specifications. Thompson hadn't quite taken as his gospel the sound business ethic that you must look out for number one first, last and always. If Tommy had broached the subject personally, if he had shown anxiety to acquire selling rights in the Summit, Thompson would have felt impelled by sheer loyalty of friendship to help Tommy secure the agency. That would have been quixotic, of course. Neverthe-

less, he would have done it, because not to do it would have seemed like taking a mean advantage. As it was —

. For the rest he warmed to the sheer beauty of the spot. Vancouver spreads largely over rolling hills and little peninsular juttings into the sea. From its eminences there sweep unequalled views over the Gulf of Georgia and northwestward along towering mountain ranges upon whose lower slopes the firs and cedars marshal themselves in green battalions. From his hotel window he would gaze in contented abstraction over the tidal surges through the First Narrows and the tall masts of shipping in a spacious harbor, landlocked and secure, stretching away like a great blue lagoon with motor craft and ferries and squat tugs for waterfowl. Thompson loved the forest as a man loves pleasant, familiar things, and next to the woods his affection turned to the sea. Here, at his hand, were both in all their primal grandeur. He was very sure he would like Vancouver.

Whether the fact that he encountered the Carrs before he was three days in town, had dinner at their home, and took Sophie once to luncheon at the Granada Grill, had anything to do with this conclusion deponent sayeth not. To be sure he learned with the first frank gleam in Sophie's gray eyes that she still held for him that mysterious pulse-quickening lure, that for him her presence was sufficient to stir a glow no other woman had ever succeeded in kindling ever so briefly. But he had acquired poise, confidence, a self-mastery not to be disputed. He said to himself that he could stand the

gaff now. He could face facts. And he said to himself further, a little wistfully, that Sophie Carr was worth all the pangs she had ever given him — more.

He could detect no change in her. That was one of the queer, personal characteristics she possessed — that she could pass beyond his ken for months, for years he almost believed, and when he met her again she would be the same, voice, manner, little tricks of speech and gesture unchanged. Meeting Sophie after that year was like meeting her after a week. Barring the clothes and the surroundings that spoke of ample means tastefully expended, the general background of her home and associates, she seemed to him unchanged. Yet when he reflected, he was not so sure of this. Sophie was gracious, friendly, frankly interested when he talked of himself. When their talk ran upon impersonal things the old nimbleness of mind functioned. But under these superficialities he could only guess, after all, what the essential woman of her was now. He could not say if she were still the queer, self-disciplined mixture of cold logic and primitive passion the Sophie Carr of Lone Moose had revealed to him. He was not sure if he desired to explore in that direction. The old scars remained. He shrank from acquiring new ones, yet perforce let his thought dwell upon her with reviving concentration. After all, he said to himself, it was on the knees of the gods.

At any rate he was not to be deterred from his project. He had served his apprenticeship in the game. He was eager to try his own wings in a flight of his own choosing.

Since he had evolved a definite plan of going about that, he entered decisively upon the first step. Upon reaching San Francisco he bearded John P. Henderson in his mahogany den and outlined a scheme which made that worthy gentleman's eyes widen. He heard Thompson to an end, however, with a growing twinkle in those same, shrewd, worldly-wise orbs, and at the finish thumped a plump fist on his desk with a force that made the pen-rack jingle.

"Damned if I don't go you," he exclaimed. "I said in the beginning you'd make a salesman, and you've made good. You'll make good in this. If you don't it isn't for lack of vision — and nerve."

"Nerve," he chuckled over the word. "You know it isn't good business for me. I'll be losing a valuable man off my staff, and I'll be taking longer chances than it has ever been my policy to take. Your only real asset is — yourself. That isn't a negotiable security."

"Not exactly," Thompson returned. "Still in your business you are compelled — every big business is compelled — to place implicit trust in certain men. From a commercial point of view this move of mine should prove even more profitable to you than if I remain on your staff as a salesman — provided your estimate of me, and my own estimate of myself, is approximately correct. You must have an outlet for your product. I will still be making money for you. In addition I shall be developing a market that will, perhaps before so very long, absorb a tremendous number of cars."

"Oh, there's no argument. I'm committed to the enterprise," Henderson declared. "I believe in *you*,

Thompson. Otherwise I couldn't see your proposition with a microscope. Well, I'll embody the various points in a contract. Come in this afternoon and sign up."

As easily as that. Thompson went down the half-flight of stairs still a trifle incredible over the ease with which he had accomplished a stroke that meant — oh, well, to his sanguine vision there was no limit.

He felt pretty much as he had felt when he sold his first Groya to an apparently hopeless prospect, elated, a little astonished at his success, brimful of confidence to cope with the next problem.

The ego in him clamored to be about this bigger business. But that was not possible. He came back to earth presently with the recollection that the Summits would not be ready for distribution before late October — and for the next five months the more Groyas he sold the better position he would be in when he went on his own.

So when he finally had in his hands a dealer's contract covering the Province of British Columbia he put the matter out of his mind — except for occasional day-dreamings upon it in idle moments — and gave himself whole-heartedly to serving the house of Henderson.

Time passed uneventfully enough. June went its way with its brides and flowers. July drove folk upon vacations to the seaside resorts.

And in August there burst upon an incredulous world the jagged lightnings and cannon-thunder of war.

It would be waste words to describe here the varying fortunes of the grappling armies during the next few months. The newspapers and current periodicals and

countless self-appointed historians have attended to that. It is all recorded, so that one must run to read it all. It is as terribly vivid to us now as it was distant and shadowy then — a madness of slaughter and destruction that raged on the other side of the earth, a terror from which we stood comfortably aloof.

There was something in the war unseen by Thompson and the Hendersons and a countless host of intelligent, well-dressed, comfortable people who bought extras wet from the press to read of that merciless thrust through Belgium, the shock and recoil and counter-shock of armies, of death dealt wholesale with scientific precision, of 42-centimeter guns and poison gas and all the rest of that bloody nightmare — they did not see the dread shadow that hung over Europe lengthening and spreading until its murky pall should span the Atlantic.

Thompson was a Canadian. He knew by the papers that Canada was at war, a voluntary participant. But it did not strike him that he was at war. He felt no call to arms. In San Francisco there was no common ferment in the public mind, no marching troops, no military bands making a man's feet tingle to follow as they passed by. Men discussed the war in much the same tone as they discussed the stock market. If there was any definite feeling in the matter it was that the European outbreak was strictly a European affair. When the German spearhead blunted its point against the Franco-British legions and the gray hosts recoiled upon the Marne, the Amateur Board of Strategy said it would be over in six months.

In any case, American tradition explicitly postulated

that what occurred in Europe was not, could not, be vital to Americans. But in the last test blood proves thicker than water. Sentimentally, the men Thompson knew were pro-Ally. Only, in practice there was no apparent reason why they should do otherwise than as they had been doing. And in effect San Francisco only emulated her sister cities when she proceeded about "business as usual"— just as in those early days, before the war had bitten deep into their flesh and blood, British merchants flung that slogan in the face of the enemy.

So that to Wes Thompson, concentrated upon his personal affairs, the war never became more than something akin to a bad dream recalled at midday, an unreal sort of thing. Something that indubitably existed without making half the impression upon him that seeing a pedestrian mangled under a street car made upon him during that summer. The war aroused his interest, but left his emotions unstirred. There was nothing martial about him. He dreamed no dreams of glory on the battlefield. He had never thought of the British Empire as something to die for. The issue was not clear to him, just as it failed to clarify itself to a great many people in those days. The maiden aunts and all his early environment had shut off the bigger vision that was sending a steady stream of Canadian battalions overseas.

When the Battle of the Marne was past history and the opposing armies had dug themselves in and the ghastly business of the trenches had begun, Thompson was more than ever immersed in pursuit of the main

chance, for he was then engaged in organizing Summit Motors in Vancouver. There had been a period when his optimism about his prospects had suffered a relapse. He had half-expected that Canada's participation in that devil's dance across the sea would spoil things commercially. There had been a sort of temporary demoralization on both sides of the line, at first. But that was presently adjusted. Through Tommy Ashe and other sources he learned that business in Vancouver was actually looking up because of the war.

He was a little surprised that Tommy was not off to the war. Tommy loved his England. He was forever singing England's praises. England was "home" to Tommy Ashe always. It was only a name to Thompson. And he thought, when he thought about it at all, that if England's need was not great enough to call her native-born, that the Allies must have the situation well in hand; as the papers had a way of stating.

He had other fish to fry, himself, without rushing off to the front. As a matter of fact he never consciously considered the question of going to the front. That never occurred to him. When he did think of the war he thought of it impersonally, as a busy man invariably does think of matters which do not directly concern him.

What did concern him most vitally was the project he had in hand. And next to those ambitions, material considerations, his fancy touched shyly now and then upon Sophie Carr.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RENEWED TRIANGLE

Even after Thompson reached Vancouver and the visible signs of a nation at war confronted him he experienced no patriotic thrill. After all, there was no great difference, on the surface, between San Francisco and Vancouver, save that Vancouver accepted as a matter of course the principle that when the mother country was at war Canada was also a belligerent and committed to support. Barring the recruiting offices draped in the Allied colors, squads of men drilling on certain public squares, successive tag days for the Red Cross, the Patriotic fund and such organizations, the war did not flaunt itself in men's faces. The first hot wave of feeling had passed. The thing had become a grim business to be gone about in grim determination. And side by side with those unostensible preparations that kept a stream of armed men passing quietly overseas, the normal business of a city waxed and throve in the old accustomed way. Thompson's most vivid impression was of accelerating business activity, and that was his chief concern. The other thing, which convulsed a far-off continent, was too distant to be a reality — like an earthquake in Japan, a reported famine in India.

He went about his business circumspectly, without

loss of time. He leased a good location, wired the factory to ship at once, began a modest advertising campaign in the local papers, and as a business coup collared — at a fat salary and liberal commission — the best salesman on the staff of the concern doing the biggest motor-car business in town. Thompson had learned certain business lessons well. He had perceived long since that it was a cutthroat game when competition grew keen. And this matter of the salesman was his first blood in that line. The man brought with him a list of prospects as long as his arm, and a wide acquaintance in the town, both assets of exceeding value. Altogether Thompson got off to a flying start. The arrangement whereby Henderson consigned cars to him enabled him to concentrate all his small capital on a sales campaign. He paid freight and duty. His cars he paid for when they were sold — and the discount was his profit.

When his salesroom was formally opened to the public, with five Summits on the floor and twice as many en route, when his undertaking and his car models had received the unqualified approval of a surprising number of callers, Thompson left the place to his salesman and went to see Sophie Carr.

That was a visit born of sudden impulse, a desire to talk about something besides automobiles and making money. But Sophie was out. Her father, however, made him welcome, supplementing his welcome with red wine that carried a kick. Thompson sat down before a fireplace, glass in hand, stretched his feet to the fire, and listened to his host talk.

"Considering your early handicaps you have certainly shown some speed in adapting yourself to conditions," Carr observed facetiously. "There was a time when I didn't believe you could. Which shows that even wise men err. Material factors loom bigger and bigger on your horizon, don't they? Don't let 'em obscure everything though, Thompson. That's a blunder plenty of smart men make. Well, we've progressed since Lone Moose days, haven't we — the four of us that foregathered there that last summer?"

Thompson smiled. He liked to hear Carr in a philosophic vein. And their talk ran thence for an hour. At the end of which time Sophie came home.

She walked into the room, shook hands with Thompson, flung her coat, hat, and furs across a chair, and drew another up to the crackling fire. Outside, the long Northern twilight was deepening. Carr rose and switched on a cluster of lights in frosted globes. In the mellow glow he resumed his seat, and his glance came to rest upon his daughter with a curious fixity, as if he subtly divined something that troubled her.

"What is it?" he asked, after a minute of unbroken silence. "You look —"

"Out of sorts?" she interrupted. "Showing up poorly as a hostess?"

Her look included Thompson with a faint, impersonal smile, and her gaze went back to the fire. Sam Carr held his peace, toying with the long-stemmed glass in his hand.

"I went to a Belgian Relief Fund lecture in the Granada ballroom this afternoon," she said at last.

"A Belgian woman — a refugee — spoke in broken English. The things she told. It was horrible. I wonder if they could be true?"

"Atrocities?" Carr questioned.

Sophie nodded.

"That's propaganda," her father declared judicially. "We're being systematically stimulated to ardent support of the war in men and money through the press and public speaking, through every available avenue that clever minds can devise. We are not a martial nation, so we have to be spurred, our emotions aroused. Of course there are atrocities. Is there an instance in history where an invading army did not commit all sorts of excesses on enemy soil?"

"I know," Sophie said absently. "But this woman's story — she wasn't one of your glib platform spouters, flag-waving and calling the Germans names. She just talked, groping now and then for the right word. And if a tithe of what she told is true — well, she made me wish I were a man."

One small, soft hand, outstretched over the chair-arm toward the fire, shut suddenly into a hard little fist. And for a moment Thompson felt acutely uncomfortable, without knowing why.

Carr eyed his daughter impassively. In a few seconds she went on.

"Of course I know that in any large army there is bound to be a certain percentage of abnormals who will be up to all sorts of deviltry whenever they find themselves free of direct restraint," she said. "The history of warfare shows that. But this Belgian

woman's account puts a different face on things. These unmentionable brutalities weren't isolated cases. Her story gave me the impression of ordered barbarity, of systematic terrorizing by the foulest means imaginable. The sort of thing the papers have been publishing — and worse."

"Discount that, Sophie," Carr remarked calmly. "The Germans are reckoned in the civilized scale the same as ourselves. I'm not ready to damn sixty-five million human beings outright because certain members of the group act like brutes. The chances are that a German soldier would be shot by his own command, for robbery or rape or any of these brutalities, as promptly as one of our own offenders. The fact of the matter is that there are a lot of hysterical people loose among us who seem to think they can kill German soldiers by calling them bad names. The Allies will win this war with cannon and bayonets, but up to the present we seem to think we must supplement our bullets with epithets. Doubtless the Germans do the same at home. It's part of the game."

"Oh, I suppose so," Sophie admitted. "But what a horror this war must be for those helpless people who are caught in its sweep."

"If it affects you like that, be thankful it isn't over here," Carr said lightly. "War is all that Sherman said it was. As a matter of fact modern warfare with every scientific and chemical means of destruction at its hand can't result in anything but horror piled on horror. I look for some startling —"

The faint whirr of a buzzer and the patter of a maid's

feet along the hall, checked Carr's speech. He did not resume. Instead he reached for a box of cigars, and lighted one. By that time Tommy Ashe was being ushered in.

Tommy exuded geniality from every pore of his ruddy countenance. He accepted the drink Carr rose to offer. He lifted the glass and smiled at Thompson.

"Here's to success," he toasted. "I believe," he went on between sips of wine, "that things are going to look up finely for us. I sold a truck and two touring cars this afternoon. People seem to be loosening up for some reason. You ought to get your share with the Summit, Wes. Snappy little machine, that."

"You rising business men," Carr drawled, "want to learn to leave your business at the office when you come to my house. Now, we were just discussing the war. What sort of a prophet are you, Tommy? How long will it last? Sophie was wondering if it would be over before all the eligible young men depart across the sea."

"Well," Tommy grinned cheerfully, "I'm no prophet. Not being in the confidence of the Allied command, I can't say. I'd hazard a guess, though, that there'll be plenty of good men left for Sophie to make a choice among. I can pass on another man's prophecy, though. Had a letter from one of my brothers yesterday. He was at Mons, got pinked in the leg, and is now training Territorials. He is sure the grand finale will come about midsummer next. The way he put it sounds logical. Neither side can make headway this winter. Germany has made her maximum effort. If she couldn't beat us when she took the field equipped

to the last button she never can. By spring we'll be organized. France and England on the west front. The Russian steam roller on the east. The fleet maintaining the blockade. They can't stand the pressure. It isn't possible. The Hun — confound him — will blow up with a loud bang about next July. That's Ned's say-so, and these line officers are pretty conservative as a rule. War's their business, and they don't nurse illusions about it."

"In the meantime, let's talk about selling automobiles, or the weather, anything but the war," Sophie said suddenly. She pressed a button on the wall. "We're going to drink tea and forget the war," she continued almost defiantly. "I won't ask either of you to stay for dinner, because I'm going out."

Carr's house sat on a slope that dipped down to a long narrow park, and beyond that to a beach on which slow rollers from the outside broke with a sound like the snore of a distant giant. Along that slope and away to the eastward the city was speckled with lights, although it was barely five o'clock, so early does dark close in in that latitude when the year is far spent. And when the maid trundled in a tea-wagon, that vista of twinkling specks, and the more distant flash of Point Atkinson light intermittently stabbing the murky Gulf, was shut away by drawn blinds, and the four of them sat in the cosy room eating little cakes and drinking tea and chatting lightly of things that bulked smaller than the war.

Presently Sam Carr drew Tommy away to the library to look up some legal technicality over which they had

fallen into dispute. Sophie lay back in her chair, eyes fixed on the red glow of the embers as if she saw through them and into vast distances beyond.

And Thompson sat covertly looking at her profile, the dull gold of her coiled hair, the red-lipped mouth that was made for kisses and laughter — and he was glad just to look at her, to be near. For he was beginning to say to himself that it was no good fighting against fate, that this girl had put some spell on him from which he would never be wholly free. Nor did he, in that mood, desire to be free. He wanted that spell to grow so strong that in the end it would weave itself about her too, make love beget love. There was quickening in him again that desire to pursue, to conquer, to possess. The ego in him whispered that once for a moment Sophie had rested like a homing bird in his arms, and would again. But he was not to be betrayed by headlong impulse. The time was not yet. Instinct warned him that in some fashion, vague, unrevealed, he had still to prove himself to Sophie Carr. He was aware intuitively that she weighed him in the balance of cold, critical reason, against any emotional appeal — just as he, himself, was learning to weigh things and men. He did not know this. He only felt it. But he felt sure of his instinct where she was concerned.

And so he was content, for the time, with the privilege of being near her. Some day —

Sophie looked at him. For the moment his own gaze had wandered from her to the fire, his mind yielding tentatively to rose-tinted visions.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said lightly.

"I was thinking of you," he answered truthfully.

He looked up as he spoke and his heart leaped at the faint flush that rose slowly over Sophie's face. Indeed all the high resolve that had been shaping in his soul for the past ten minutes came near going by the board. It would have been so easy to imprison the hand that lay along the chair-arm next his own, to utter words that trembled on his tongue, to break through the ice that Sophie used as a shield — for the instant he felt sure of that — and dare what fires burned beneath.

While he stood, poised as it were, upon the tip-toe of indecision, Carr and Tommy Ashe came back.

Afterward, on his way home, Thompson wondered at the swift challenging glance Tommy shot at Sophie in that moment. As if Tommy detected some tensity of feeling that he resented.

CHAPTER XXII

SUNDRY REFLECTIONS

That winter and the summer which followed, and the period which carried him into the spring of 1916, was materially a triumphal procession for Wes Thompson. Tommy's forecast of the war's ending had fallen short as so many other forecasts did. The war went on, developing its own particular horrors as it spread. But the varying tides of war, and the manifold demands of war, bestowed upon Vancouver a heaping measure of prosperity, and Vancouver, in the person of its business men, was rather too far from the sweat and blood of the struggle to be distracted by the issues of that struggle from its own immediate purposes. Business men were in business to make money. They supported the war effort. Every one could not go to the trenches. Workers were as necessary to victory as fighters. People had to be fed and clothed. The army had to be fed and clothed, transported and munitioned. And the fact that the supplying and equipping and transporting was highly profitable to those engaged in such pursuits did not detract from the essentially patriotic and necessary performance of these tasks.

The effect on Vancouver was an industrial rejuvena-

tion. Money flowed in all sorts of channels hitherto nearly dry. A lot of it flowed to Wesley Thompson in exchange for Summit cars. Thompson was like many other men in Vancouver. He was very busy. The business stood on its feet by virtue of his direction. If he dropped it and rushed off to the war — well there was no lack of men, men who had no particular standing, men who could not subscribe to war charities, to Dominion war-bond issues. There was plenty of manpower. There was never a surplus of brain-power. Business was necessary. So a man with a live, thriving business was fighting in his own way — doing his bit to keep the wheels turning — standing stoutly behind the fellow with a bayonet. And a lot of them let it go at that. A lot of them saw no pressing need to don khaki and let everything else go to pot. A lot of them were so intent upon making the most of their opportunities that they never brought their innermost thoughts out on the table and asked themselves point-blank: "Should I go? Why shouldn't I?" And there were some who saw dimly — as the months slid by with air raids and submarine sinkings and all the new, terrible devices of death and destruction which transgressed the old usages of war — there were some who were troubled without knowing why. There were men who hated bloodshed, who hated violence, who wished to live and love and go their ways in peace, but who began uneasily to question whether these things they valued were of such high value after all.

And Wes Thompson was one of these. Deep in him his emotions were stirring. The old tribal instinct —

which sent a man forth to fight for the tribe no matter the cause — was functioning under the layer of stuff that civilization imposes on every man. His reason gainsaid these stirrings, those instinctive urgings, but there was a stirring and it troubled him. He did not desire to die in a trench, nor vanish in fragments before a bursting shell, nor lie face to the stars in No Man's Land with a bayonet hole in his middle. He would not risk these fatalities for any such academic idea as saving the world for democracy.

Always when that queer, semi-dormant tribe instinct suggested that he go fight with the tribe against the tribal enemy his reason swiftly choked the impulse. He would not fight for a political abstraction. He had read history. It is littered with broken treaties. If he fought it would be because he felt there was need to strike a blow for something righteous. And his faith in the righteousness of the Allied cause was still unfired. He saw no mission to compel justice, to exact retribution, only a clash of Great Powers, in which the common man was fed to the roaring guns.

But he was not so obtuse as to fail of seeing the near future. The Germans were proving a right hard nut to crack. It might be — remotely — that a man would have no choice in the matter of fighting. He saw that cloud on the horizon. Sometimes he wished that he could muster up a genuine enthusiasm for this business of war. He saw men who had it and wondered privately how they came by it.

If he could have felt it an imperative duty laid upon him, that would have settled certain matters out of

hand. Chief among these would have been the problem of Sophie Carr.

Sophie eluded and mystified him. Not wholly in a physical sense — although, to be exact, she did become less accessible in a purely physical sense. But it went deeper than that. During the eighteen months following Thompson's motor-sales début he never succeeded in establishing between them the same sense of spiritual communion that he had briefly glimpsed those few minutes in Carr's home on the way he opened his salesroom.

There was Tommy, for instance. Tommy was far closer to Sophie Carr than he, Thompson, could manage to come, no matter how he tried. He and Tommy were friends. They had apartments in the same house. They saw each other constantly. The matter of competition in business was purely nominal. They were both too successful in business to be envious of each other in that respect. But where Sophie Carr was concerned it was a conflict, no less existent because neither man ever betrayed his consciousness of such a conflict. Indeed Thompson sometimes wondered uneasily if Ashe's serenity came from an understanding with her. But he doubted that. Tommy had not won — yet. That intangible yet impenetrable wall which was rising about Sophie was built of other, sterner stuff.

She seldom touched on the war, never more than a casual sentence or two. Perhaps a phrase would flash like a sword, and then her lips would close. Carr would discuss the war from any angle whatsoever, at any time. It became an engrossing topic with him, as if there were phases that puzzled him, upon which he de-

sired light. He ceased to be positive. But his daughter shunned war talk.

Yet the war levied high toll on her waking hours, and for that reason Thompson seldom saw her save in company. His vision of little dinners, of drives together, of impromptu luncheons, of a steady siege in which the sheer warmth of that passion in him should force capitulation to his love — all those pleasant dreams went a-glimmering. Sophie was always on some committee, directing some activity growing out of the war, Red Cross work, Patriotic Fund, all those manifold avenues through which the women fought their share of Canada's fight. For a pleasure-loving creature Sophie Carr seemed to have undergone an astonishing metamorphosis. She spent on these things, quietly, without parade or press-agenting, all the energy in her, and she had no reserve left for play. War work seemed to mean something to Sophie besides write-ups in the society column and pictures of her in sundry poses. These things besides, surrounded her with all sorts of fussy people, both male and female, and through this cordon Thompson seldom broke for confidential talk with her. When he did Sophie baffled him with her calm detachment, a profound and ever-increasing reserve — as if she had ceased to be a woman and become a mere, coldly beautiful mechanism for seeing about shipments of bandage stuff, for collecting funds, and devising practical methods of raising more funds and creating more supplies.

Thompson said as much to her one day. She looked at him unmoved, unsmiling. And something that lurked

in her clear gray eyes made him uncomfortable, sent him away wondering. It was as if somehow she disapproved. A shadowy impression at best. He wondered if Tommy fared any better, and he was constrained to think Tommy did because Tommy went in for patriotic work a good deal, activities that threw him in pretty close contact with Sophie.

"I can spare the time," he confided to Thompson one day. "And it's good business. I meet some pretty influential people. Why don't you spread yourself a little more, Wes? They'll be saying you're a slacker if you don't make a noise."

"I don't fight the Germans with my mouth," Thompson responded shortly. And Tommy laughed.

"That's a popular weapon these days," he returned lightly. "It does no harm to go armed with it."

Thompson refrained from further speech. That very morning in the lobby of the Granada Thompson had heard one man sneer at another for a slacker — and get knocked down for his pains. He did not want to inflict that indignity on Tommy, and he felt that he would if Tommy made any more cynical reflections.

Of course, that was a mere flaring-up of resentment at the fact that, to save his soul, he could not get off the fence. He could not view the war as a matter vital to himself; nor could he do like Tommy Ashe, play patriotic tunes with one hand while the other reached slyly forth to grasp power and privilege of whatever degree came within reach.

And in the meantime both men, and other men likewise, went about their daily affairs. Vancouver grew

and prospered, and the growth of Summit sales left an increasing balance on the profit side of Thompson's ledger. Moreover the rapid and steady growth of his business kept his mind on the business. It worked out — his business preoccupation — much in the manner of the old story of fleas and dogs, to wit: a certain number of fleas is good for a dog. They keep him from brooding over the fact that he *is* a dog.

So, save for the fact that he continued to make money and was busy and realized now and then that he had come to a disheartening impasse with Sophie, the late spring of 1916 found Thompson mentally, morally and spiritually holding fast by certain props.

He had come a long way, and he had yet a long way to go. He had come to Lone Moose very much after the fashion of St. Simeon Stylites all prepared to mount a spiritual pillar and make a bid for sainthood. But pillar hermits, he discovered, when harsh, material facts tore the evangelistic blinkers off his eyes, were neither useful in the world nor acceptable on high. He had been in a very bad way for awhile. When a man loses his own self-respect and the faith of his fathers at one stroke he is apt to suffer intensely. Thompson had not quite reached that pass, when he came down to Wrangel by the sea, but he was not far off. When he looked back, he could scarcely trace by what successive steps he had traveled. But he had got up out of that puddle into which a harsh environment and wounded egotism had cast him. He was in a way to be what the world called a success.

He was not so sure of that himself. But he stayed

himself with certain props, as before mentioned. The base of more than one of these useful supports had been undermined some time before by a sequence of events which presented the paradox of being familiar to him and still beyond his comprehension.

He was a long way from being aware, in those early summer days of 1916, that before long some of the aforementioned props were to buckle under him with strange and disturbing circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FUSE —

It was in this period that certain phases of the war began to shake the foundation of things. I do not recall who said that an army marches on its stomach, but it is true, and it is no less a verity that nations function primarily on food. The submarine was waxing to its zenith now, and Europe saw the gaunt wolf at its door. Men cried for more ships. Cost became secondary. A vessel paid for herself if she landed but two cargoes in an Allied port.

Every demand in the economic field produces a supply. On this side of the Atlantic great ship-building plants arose by some superior magic of construction in ports where the building of ships had been a minor industry. In this Vancouver did not lag. Wooden ships could be built quickly. Virgin forests of fir and cedar stood at Vancouver's very door. Wherefore yards, capable of turning out a three-thousand-ton wooden steamer in ninety days, rose on tidewater, and an army of labor sawed and hammered and shaped to the ultimate confusion of the Hun.

Thompson had seen these yards in the distance. He read newspapers and he knew that local shipbuilding

was playing the dual purpose of confounding the enemy and adding a huge pay-roll to Vancouver's other material advantages. Both of which were highly desirable.

But few details of this came personally to his attention until an evening when he happened to foregather with Tommy Ashe and two or three others at Carr's home — upon one of those rare evenings when Sophie was free of her self-imposed duties and in a mood to play the hostess.

They had dined, and were gathered upon a wide verandah watching the sun sink behind the rampart of Vancouver Island in a futurist riot of yellow and red that died at last to an afterglow which lingered on the mountain tops like a benediction. A bit of the Gulf opened to them, steel-gray, mirror-smooth, more like a placid, hill-ringed lake than the troubled sea.

But there was more in the eye's cast than beauty of sea and sky and setting sun. From their seats they could look down on the curious jumble of long sheds and giant scaffolding that was the great Coughlan steel shipyard in False Creek. Farther distant, on the North Shore, there was the yellowish smudge of what a keen vision discerned to be six wooden schooners in a row, sister ships in varying stages of construction.

Some one said something about wooden shipbuilding.

"There's another big yard starting on the North Shore," Sophie said. "One of our committee was telling me to-day. Her husband has something to do with it."

"Yes. I can verify that," Tommy Ashe smiled. "That's my contribution — the Vancouver Construc-

tion Company. I organized it. We have contracted to supply the Imperial Munitions Board with ten auxiliary schooners, three thousand tons burden each."

The fourth man of the party, the lean, suave, enterprising head of a local trust company, nodded approval, eyeing Tommy with new interest.

"Good business," he commented. "We've got to beat those U-boats."

"Yes," Tommy agreed, "and until the Admiralty devises some effectual method of coping with them, the only way we can beat the subs is to build ships faster than they can sink them. It's quite some undertaking, but it has to be done. If we fail to keep supplies pouring into England and France. Well —"

He spread his hands in an expressive gesture. Tommy was that type of Englishman in which rugged health and some generations of breeding and education have combined to produce what Europe calls a "gentleman." He was above middle height, very stoutly and squarely built, ruddy faced — the sort of man one may safely prophesy will acquire a paunch and double chin with middle age. But Tommy was young and vigorous yet. He looked very capable, almost aggressive, as he sat there speaking with the surety of patriotic conviction.

"We're all in it now," he said simply. "It's no longer our army and navy against their army and navy and the rest of us looking on from the side lines. It's our complete material resources and man power against their complete resources and man power. If *they* win, the world won't be worth living in, for the Anglo-Saxon.

So we've got to beat them. Every man's job from now on is going to be either fighting or working. We've got to have ships. I'm organizing that yard to work top-speed. I'm trying to set a pace. Watch us on the North Shore. The man in the trenches won't say we didn't back him up."

It sounded well. To Thompson it gave a feeling of dissatisfaction which was nowise lessened by the momentary gleam in Sophie's eyes as they rested briefly on Tommy and passed casually to him — and beyond.

He was growing slowly to understand that the war had somehow — in a fashion beyond his comprehension — bitten deep into Sophie Carr's soul. She thought about it, if she seldom talked. What was perhaps more vital, she *felt* about it with an intensity Thompson could not fathom, because he had not experienced such feeling himself. He only divined this. Sophie never paraded either her thoughts or her feelings. And divining this uneasily he foresaw a shortening of his stature in her eyes by comparison with Tommy Ashe — who had become a doer, a creator in the common need, while *he* remained a gleaner in the field of self-interest. Thompson rather resented that imputation. Privately he considered Tommy's speech a trifle grandiloquent. He began to think he had underestimated Tommy, in more ways than one.

Nor did he fail to wonder at the dry smile that hovered about Sam Carr's lips until that worthy old gentleman put his hand over his mouth to hide it, while his shrewd old eyes twinkled with inner amusement. There was something more than amusement, too. If Wes

Thompson had not known that Sam Carr liked Tommy, rather admired his push and ability to hold his own in the general scramble, he would have said Carr's smile and eyes tinged the amusement with something like contempt.

That puzzled Thompson. The Dominion, as well as the Empire, was slowly formulating the war-doctrine that men must either fight or work. Tommy, with his executive ability, his enthusiasm, was plunging into a needed work. Tommy had a right to feel that he was doing a big thing. Thompson granted him that. Why, then, should Carr look at him like that?

He was still recurring to that when he drove down town with Tommy later in the evening. He was not surprised that Tommy sauntered into his rooms after putting up his machine. He had been in the habit of doing that until lately, and Thompson knew now that Tommy must have been very busy on that shipyard organization. It had been easy for them to drop into the old intimacy which had grown up between them on that hard, long trail between Lone Moose and the Stikine. They had a lot of common ground to meet on besides that.

This night Tommy had something on his mind besides casual conversation. He wasted little time in preliminaries.

"Would you be interested in taking over my car agencies on a percentage basis, Wes?" he asked point-blank, when he had settled himself in a chair with a cigar in his mouth. "I have worked up a good business with the Standard and the Petit Six. I don't like to

let it go altogether. I shall have to devote all my time to the ship plant. That looms biggest on the horizon. But I want to hold these agencies as an anchor to windward. You could run both places without either suffering, I'm confident. I'll make you a good proposition."

Thompson reflected a minute.

"What is your proposition?" he asked at length. "I daresay I could handle it. But I can't commit myself offhand."

"Of course not," Tommy agreed. "You can go over my books from the beginning, and see for yourself what the business amounts to. I'd be willing to allow you seventy-five per cent. of the net. Based on last year's business you should clear twelve thousand per annum. Sales are on the up. You might double that. I would hold an option of taking over the business on ninety days' notice."

"It sounds all right," Thompson admitted. "I'll look into it."

"I want quick action," Tommy declared. "Say, tomorrow you arrange for some certified accountant to go over my books and make out a balance sheet. I'll pay his fee. I'm anxious to be free to work on the ship end."

"All right. I'll do that. We can arrange the details later if I decide to take you up," Thompson said.

Tommy stretched his arms and yawned.

"By jove," said he, "I'm going to be the busiest thing on wheels for awhile. It's no joke running a big show."

"I didn't know you were a shipbuilder," Thompson commented.

"I'm not," Tommy admitted, stifling another yawn. "But I can hire 'em — both brains and labor. The main thing is I've got the contracts. That's the chief item in this war business. The rest is chiefly a matter of business judgment. It's something of a jump, I'll admit, but I can negotiate it, all right."

"As a matter of fact," he continued presently, and with a highly self-satisfied note in his voice, "apart from the executive work it's what the Americans call a lead-pipe cinch. We can't lose. I've been fishing for this quite a while, and I put it over by getting in touch with the right people. It's wonderful what you can do in the proper quarter. The Vancouver Construction Company consists of Joe Hedley and myself. Joe is a very clever chap. Has influential people, too. We have contracts with the I. M. B. calling for ten schooners estimated to cost three hundred thousand dollars per. We finance the construction, but we don't really risk a penny. The contracts are on a basis of cost, plus ten per cent. You see? If we go above or under the estimate it doesn't matter much. Our profit is fixed. The main consideration is speed. The only thing we can be penalized for is failure to launch and deliver within specified dates."

Thompson did a rough bit of mental figuring.

"I should say it was a cinch," he said dryly. "Nobody can accuse you of profiteering. Yet your undertaking is both patriotic and profitable. I suppose you had no trouble financing a thing like that?"

"I should say not. The banks," Tommy replied with cynical emphasis, "would fall over themselves to get their finger in our pie. But they won't. Hedley and I have some money. Sam Carr is letting us have fifty thousand dollars at seven per cent. No bank is going to charge like the Old Guard at Waterloo on overdrafts and advances — and dictate to us besides. I'm too wise for that. I'm not in the game for my health. I see a big lump of money, and I'm after it."

"I suppose we all are," Thompson reflected absently.

"Certainly," Tommy responded promptly. "And we'd be suckers if we weren't."

He took a puff or two at his cigar and rose.

"Run over to the plant on the North Shore with me to-morrow if you have the time. We'll give it the once over, and take a look at the Wallace yard too. They're starting on steel tramps there now. I'm going over about two o'clock. Will you?"

"Sure. I'll take time," Thompson agreed.

"Come down to MacFee's wharf and go over with me on the *Alert*," Tommy went on. "That's the quickest and easiest way to cross the Inlet. Two o'clock. Well, I'm off to bed. Good night, old man."

"Good night."

The hall door clicked behind Ashe. Thompson sat deep in thought for a long time. Then he fished a note pad out of a drawer and began pencilling figures.

Ten times three hundred thousand was three million. Ten per cent. on three million was three hundred thousand dollars. And no chance to lose. The ten per cent. on construction cost was guaranteed by the Im-

perial Munitions Board, behind which stood the British Empire.

Didn't Tommy say the ten schooners were to be completed in eight months? Then in eight months Tommy Ashe was going to be approximately one hundred and fifty thousand dollars richer.

Thompson wondered if that was why Sam Carr looked at Tommy with that ambiguous expression when Tommy was chanting his work or fight philosophy. Carr knew the ins and outs of the deal if he were loaning money on it.

And Thompson did not like to think he had read Carr's look aright, because he was uncomfortably aware that he, Wes Thompson, was following pretty much in Ashe's footsteps, only on a smaller scale.

He tore the figured sheet into little strips, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXIV

— AND THE MATCH THAT LIT THE FUSE —

At a minute or two of ten the next morning Thompson stopped his car before the Canadian Bank of Commerce. The bolt-studded doors were still closed, and so he kept his seat behind the steering column, glancing idly along Hastings at the traffic that flowed about the gray stone pile of the post-office, while he waited the bank's opening for business.

A tall young man, a bit paler-faced perhaps than a normal young fellow should be, but otherwise a fine-looking specimen of manhood, sauntered slowly around the corner of the bank, and came to a stop on the curb just abreast the fore end of Thompson's motor. He took out a cigarette and lighted it with slow, deliberate motions. And as he stood there, gazing with a detached impersonal air at the front of the Summit roadster, there approached him a recruiting sergeant.

"How about joining up this morning?" he inquired briskly.

"Oh, I don't know," the young man responded casually. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Every man should be thinking about it," the sergeant declared. "The army needs men. Now a well-

set-up young fellow like you would get on capitally at soldiering. It's a great life. When we get the Germans whipped every man will be proud to say he had a hand in it. If a man struck you you wouldn't stand back and let some other fellow do your fighting for you, now would you? More than that, between you and me, it won't be long before an able-bodied man can't walk these streets in civvies, without the girls hooting him. It's a man's duty to get into this war. Better walk along with me to headquarters and sign on."

The young man gazed across the street with the same immobility of expression.

"What's the inducement?" he asked presently.

The sergeant, taking his cue from this, launched forth upon a glowing description of army life, the pay, the glory, the manifold advantages that would certainly accrue. He painted a rosy picture, a gallant picture. One gathered from his talk that a private in khaki was greater than a captain of industry in civilian clothes. He dwelt upon the brotherhood, the democracy of arms. He spilled forth a lot of the buncombe that is swallowed by those who do not know from bitter experience that war, at best, is a ghastly job in its modern phases, a thing that the common man may be constrained to undertake if need arises, but which brings him little pleasure and less glory — beyond the consciousness that he has played his part as a man should.

The young man heard the recruiting sergeant to an end. And when that worthy had finished he found fixed steadily upon him a pair of coldly speculative gray-green eyes.

"How long have you been in the army?" he asked.

"About eighteen months," the sergeant stated.

"Have you been over there?"

"No," the sergeant admitted. "I expect to go soon, but for the present I'm detailed to recruiting."

The young man had a flower in the lapel of his coat. He removed it, the flower, and thrust the lapel in the sergeant's face. The flower had concealed a bronze button.

"I've been over there," the young man said calmly. "There's my button, and my discharge is in my pocket — with the names of places on it that you'll likely never see. I was in the Princess Pats — you know what happened to the Pats. You have hinted I was a slacker, that every man not in uniform is a slacker. Let me tell you something. I know your gabby kind. The country's full of such as you. So's England. The war's gone two years and you're still here, going around telling other men to go to the front. Go there yourself, and get a taste of it. When you've put in fourteen months in hell like I did, you won't go around peddling the brand of hot air you've shot into me, just now."

"I didn't know you were a returned man," the sergeant said placatingly. A pointed barb of resentment had crept into the other's tone as he spoke.

"Well, I am," the other snapped. "And I'd advise you to get a new line of talk. Don't talk to me, anyway. Beat it. I've done my bit."

The sergeant moved on without another word, and the other man likewise went his way, with just the mer-

est suggestion of a limp. And simultaneously the great doors of the bank swung open. Thompson looked first after one man then after the other, and passed into the bank with a thoughtful look on his face.

He finished his business there. Other things occupied his attention until noon. He lunched. After that he drove to Coal Harbor where the yachts lie and motor boats find mooring, and having a little time to spare before Tommy's arrival, walked about the slips looking over the pleasure craft berthed thereat. Boats appealed to Thompson. He had taken some pleasant cruises with friends along the coast. Some day he intended to have a cruising launch. Tommy had already attained that distinction. He owned a trim forty-footer, the *Alert*. Thompson's wanderings presently brought him to this packet.

A man sat under the awning over the after deck. Thompson recognized in him the same individual upon whom the recruiting sergeant's eloquence had been wasted that morning. He was in clean overalls, a seaman's peaked cap on his head. Thompson had felt an impulse to speak to the man that morning. If any legitimate excuse had offered he would have done so. To find the man apparently at home on the boat in which he himself was taking brief passage was a coincidence of which Thompson proceeded to take immediate advantage. He climbed into the cockpit. The man looked at him questioningly.

"I'm going across the Inlet with Mr. Ashe," Thompson explained. "Are you on the *Alert?*"

"Engineer, skipper, and bo'sun too," the man re-

sponded whimsically. "Cook, captain, and the whole damn crew."

They fell into talk. The man was intelligent, but there was a queer abstraction sometimes in his manner. Once the motor of a near-by craft fired with a staccato roar, and he jumped violently. He looked at Thompson unsmiling.

"I'm pretty jumpy yet," he said — but he did not explain why. He did not say he had been overseas. He did not mention the war. He talked of the coast, and timber, and fishing, and the adjacent islands, with all of which he seemed to be fairly familiar.

"I heard that recruiting sergeant tackle you this morning," Thompson said at last. "You were standing almost beside my machine. What was it like over there?"

"What was it like?" the man repeated. He shook his head. "That's a big order. I couldn't tell you in six months. It wasn't nice."

He seemed to reflect a second or two.

"I suppose some one has to do it. It has to be done. But it's a tough game. You don't know where you're going nor what you're up against most of the time. The racket gets a man, as well as seeing fellows you know getting bumped off now and then. Some of the boys get hardened to it. I never did. I try to forget it now, mostly. But I dream things sometimes, and any sudden noise makes me jump. A fellow had better finish over there than come home crippled. I'm lucky to hold down a job like this, lucky that I happen to know gas engines and boats. I look all right, but I'm

not much good. All chewed up with shrapnel. And my nerve's gone. I wouldn't have got my discharge if they could have used me any more. Aw, hell, if you haven't been in it you can't imagine what it's like. I couldn't tell you."

"Tell me one thing," Thompson asked quickly, spurred by an impulse for light upon certain matters which had troubled him. He wanted the word of an eye-witness. "Did you ever see, personally, any of those atrocities that have been laid to the Germans in Belgium?"

"Well, I don't know," the man replied. "The papers have printed a lot of stuff. Mind you, over there you hear about a lot of things you never see. The only thing *I* saw was children with their hands hacked off at the wrist."

"Good God," Thompson uttered. "You actually saw that with your own eyes."

"Sure," the man responded. "Nine of 'em in one village.

"Why, in the name of God, would men do such a thing?" Thompson demanded. "Was any reason ever given?"

"No. I suppose they were drunk or something. Fritz was pretty bad in spots, all right. Maybe they just wanted to put the fear of God in their hearts. A pal of mine in Flanders told me of a woman — in a place they took by a night raid — she had her breast slashed open. She said a Boche officer did it with his sword."

The man spoke of these things in a detached, impersonal manner, as one who states commonplace facts.

He had not particularly desired to speak of them. For him those gruesome incidents of war and invasion held no special horror. They might have rested heavily enough on his mind once. But he had come apparently to accept them as the grim collateral of war, without reacting emotionally to their terrible significance. And when Thompson ceased to question him he ceased to talk.

But in Thompson these calmly recounted horrors worked profound distress. His imagination became immediately shot with sinister pictures. All these things which he had read and doubted, which had left him unmoved, now took on a terrible reality. He could see these things about which the returned soldier spoke, and seeing them believed. Believing, there rose within him a protest that choked him with its force as he sat in the cockpit beside this veteran of Flanders.

The man had fallen silent, staring into the green depths overside. Thompson sat silent beside him. But there was in Thompson none of the other's passivity. Unlike the returned soldier, who had seen blood and death until he was surfeited with it, until he wanted nothing but peace and quietness, and a chance to rest his shrapnel-torn body and shell-shocked nerves, Thompson quivered with a swift, hot desire to kill and destroy, to inflict vengeance. He burned for reprisal. For a passionate moment he felt as if he could rend with his bare hands a man or men who could wantonly mutilate women and children. He could find no fit name for such deeds.

And, responding so surely to that unexpected stim-

ulus, he had no stomach for crossing the Inlet as Tommy's guest, to view the scene of Tommy's industrial triumph-to-be. He wasn't interested in that now.

Sitting under the awning, brooding over these things, he remembered how Sophie Carr had reacted to the story of the Belgian refugee that afternoon a year and a half ago. He understood at last. He divined how Sophie felt that day. And he had blandly discounted those things. He had gone about his individual concerns insulated against any call to right wrongs, to fight oppression, to abolish that terror which loomed over Europe — and which might very well lay its sinister hand on America, if the Germans were capable of these things, and if the German's military power prevailed over France and England. When he envisaged Canada as another Belgium his teeth came together with a little click.

He clambered out of the *Alert's* cockpit to the float.

"Tell Mr. Ashe I changed my mind about going over with him," he said abruptly, and walked off the float, up the sloping bank to the street, got in his car and drove away.

As he drove he felt that he had failed to keep faith with something or other. He felt bewildered. Those little children, shorn of their hands — so that they could never lift a sword against Germany — cried aloud to him. They held up their bloody stumps for him to see.

CHAPTER XXV

— AND THE BOMB THE FUSE FIRED

It took Thompson approximately forty-eight hours to arrange his affairs. He managed things with a precipitancy that would have shocked a sound, practical business man, for he put out no anchors to windward nor troubled himself about the future. He paid his bills, transferred the Summit agency to his head salesman — who had amassed sufficient capital to purchase the stock of cars and parts at cost. Thus, having deliberately sacrificed a number of sound assets for the sake of being free of them without delay, Thompson found himself upon the morning of the third day without a tie to bind him to Vancouver, and a cash balance of twenty thousand dollars to his credit in the bank.

He did not know how, or in what capacity he was going to the front, but he was going, and the manner of his going did not concern him greatly. It mattered little how he went, so long as he went in the service of his country. A little of his haste was born of the sudden realization that he had a country which needed his services — and that he desired to serve. It had passed an emotional phase with him. He saw it very clearly as a duty. He did not foresee or anticipate either pleasure or glory in the undertaking. He

had no illusions about war. It was quite on the cards that he might never come back. But he had to go.

So then he had only to determine how he should go.

That problem, which was less a problem than a matter of making choice, was solved that very day at luncheon. As he sat at a table in a down-town café there came to him a figure in khaki, wearing a short, close-fitting jacket with an odd emblem on the left sleeve — a young fellow who hailed Thompson with a hearty grip and a friendly grin. He sat himself in a chair vis-à-vis, laying his funny, wedge-shaped cap on the table.

"I've been wondering what had become of you, Jimmie," Thompson said. "I see now. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"East," the other returned tersely. "Training. Got my wings. Off to England day after to-morrow. How's everything with you, these days?"

Thompson looked his man over thoroughly. Jimmie Wells was the youngest of the four sons of a wealthy man. The other three were at the front, one of them already taking his long rest under a white, wooden cross somewhere in France. Jimmie looked brown and fit. A momentary pang of regret stung Thompson. He wished he too were standing in uniform, ready for overseas.

"I've just wound up my business," he said. "I'm going to the front myself, Jimmie."

"Good," Wells approved. "What branch?"

"I don't know yet," Thompson replied. "I made up my mind in a hurry. I'm just setting out to find where I'll fit in best."

"Why don't you try aviation?" Jimmie Wells suggested. "You ought to make good in that. There are a lot of good fellows flying. If you want action, the R. F. C. is the sportiest lot of all."

"I might. I didn't think of that," Thompson returned slowly. "Yes, I believe I could fly."

"If you can fly like you drive, you'll be the goods," Jimmie asserted cheerfully. "Tell you what, Thompson. Come on around to the Flying Corps headquarters with me. I know a fellow there rather well, and I'll introduce you. Not that that will get you anything, only Holmes will give you a lot of unofficial information."

Thompson rose from the table.

"Lead me to it," said he. "I'm your man."

Getting accepted as a cadet in the Royal Flying Corps was not so simple a matter as enlisting in the infantry. The requirements were infinitely more rigid. The R. F. C. took only the cream of the country's manhood. They told Thompson his age was against him — and he was only twenty-eight. It was true. Ninety per cent. of the winged men were five years younger. But he passed all their tests by grace of a magnificent body that housed an active brain and steady nerves.

All this did not transpire overnight. It took days. He told no one of his plans in the meantime, no one but Tommy Ashe, who was a trifle disappointed when Thompson declined to handle Tommy's exceedingly profitable motor business. Tommy seemed hurt. To make it clear that he had a vital reason, Thompson explained tersely.

"I can't do it because I'm going to the front."

"Eh? What the devil!"

Tommy looked all the astonishment his tone expressed.

"Well, *what* the devil?" Thompson returned tartly. "Is there anything strange about that? A good many men have gone. A good many more will have to go before this thing is settled. Why not?"

"Oh, if a man feels that he *should*," Tommy began. He seemed at a loss for words, and ended lamely: "There's plenty of cannon-fodder in the country without men of your caliber wasting themselves in the trenches. You haven't the military training nor the pull to get a commission."

Thompson's lips opened to retort with a sentence he knew would sting like a whiplash. But he thought better of it. He would not try plucking the mote out of another man's eye, when he had so recently got clear of the beam in his own.

Tommy did not tarry long after that. He wished Thompson good luck, but he left behind him the impression that he privately considered it a poor move. Thompson was willing to concede that from a purely material standpoint it was a poor move. But he could no longer adopt the purely materialistic view. It had suddenly become clear to him that he must go — and *why* he must go. Just as the citizen whose house gets on fire knows beyond peradventure that he must quench the flames if it lies in his power.

The Royal Flying Corps arrives at its ends slowly. Perhaps not too slowly for the niceness of choice that

must be made. Presently there came to Wesley Thompson a brief order to report at a training camp in Eastern Canada.

When he held this paper in his hand and knew himself committed irrevocably to the greatest game of all, he felt a queer, inner glow, a quiet satisfaction such as must come to a man who succeeds in some high enterprise. Thompson felt this in spite of desperate facts. He had no illusions as to what he had set about. He knew very well that in the R. F. C. it was a short life and not always a merry one. Of course a man might be lucky. He might survive by superior skill. In any case it had to be done.

But he was moved likewise by a strange loneliness, and with his orders in his hand he understood at last the source of that peculiar regret which latterly had assailed him in stray moments. There were a few friends to bid good-by. And chief, if she came last on his round of calls that last day, was Sophie Carr.

He found Sophie at home about four in the afternoon, sitting in the big living room, making Red Cross bandages. She did not stop her work when he was ushered in. Beside her on a table stood a flat box and in this from time to time she put a finished roll. It occurred to Thompson that sometime one of those white bandages fabricated by her hands might be used on him.

He smiled a bit sardonically, for the thought arose also that in the Flying Corps the man who lost in aërial combat needed little besides a coffin — and sometimes not even that.

Sophie looked at him almost somberly.

"I'm working, don't you see?" she said curtly.

He had never seen her in quite that unapproachable mood. He wanted her to forget the Red Cross and the war for a little while, to look and speak with the old lightness. He wasn't a sentimental man, but he did want to go away with a picture of her smiling. He had not told her he was going. He did not mean to tell her till he was leaving, and then only to say casually: "Well, good-by. I'm off for a training-camp to-night." He had always suspected there was something of the Spartan in Sophie Carr's make-up. Even if he had not divined that, he had no intention of making a fuss about his going, of trying to pose as a hero. But he was a normal man, and he wanted his last recollection of her — if it *should* be his last — to be a pleasant one.

And Sophie was looking at him now, fixedly, a frosty gleam in her gray eyes. She looked a moment, and her breast heaved. She swept the work off her lap with a sudden, swift gesture.

"What is the matter with you — and dozens of men like you that I know?" she demanded in a choked voice. "You stay at home living easy and getting rich in the security that other men are buying with their blood and their lives, over there. Fighting against odds and dying like dogs in a ditch so that we can live here in peace and comfort. You don't even do anything useful here. There doesn't seem to be anything that can make you work or fight. They can sink passenger ships and bomb undefended towns and shell hospitals, and you

don't seem to resent it. I've heard you prate about service — when you thought you walked with God and had a mission from God to show other men the way. Why don't you serve now? What is the matter with you? Is your skin so precious? If you can't fight, can't you make ammunition or help to build ships? Are you a man, or just a rabbit? I wish to God *I* were a man."

Thompson rose to his feet. The lash of her tongue had not lost its power to sting since those far-off Lone Moose days. Yet, though it stabbed like a spear, he was more conscious of a passionate craving to gather her into his arms than of anger and resentment. There were tears in Sophie's eyes — but there was no softness in her tone. Her red lips curled as Thompson looked at her in dazed silence. There did not seem to be anything he could say — not with Sophie looking at him like that.

"If you feel that way about it —"

He broke off in the middle of the muttered sentence, turned on his heel, walked out of the room. And he went down the street suffering from a species of shock, saying desperately to himself that it did not matter, nothing mattered.

But he knew that was a lie, a lie he told himself to keep his soul from growing sick.

He went back to his rooms for the last time, and tried with pen and paper to set down some justification of himself for Sophie's eyes. But he could not satisfy himself with that. His pride revolted against it. Why should he plead? Or rather, what was the use of plead-

ing? Why should he explain? He had a case for the defence, but defence avails nothing after sentence has been pronounced. He had waited too long. He had been tried and found wanting.

He tore the letter into strips, and having sent his things to the station long before, put on his hat now and walked slowly there himself, for it lacked but an hour of train-time.

At the corner of Pender and Hastings he met Sam Carr.

"Welcome, youthful stranger," Carr greeted heartily. "I haven't seen you for a long time. Walk down to the Strand with me and have a drink. I've been looking over the Vancouver Construction Company's yard, and it's a very dry place."

Thompson assented. He had time and it was on his way. He reacted willingly to the suggestion. He needed something to revive his spirit, but he had not thought of the stimulus of John Barleycorn until Carr spoke.

In the Strand bar he poured himself half a glass of Scotch whisky. Carr regarded him meditatively over port wine.

"That's the first time I ever saw you touch the hard stuff," he observed.

"It will probably be the last," Thompson replied.

"Why?"

"I'm off," Thompson explained. "I have sold out my business and have been accepted for the Royal Flying Corps. I'm taking the train at six to report at Eastern headquarters."

Carr fingered the stem of his empty glass a second. "I hate to see you go, and still I'm glad you're going," he said with an odd, wistful note in his voice. "I'd go too, Thompson, if I weren't too old to be any use over there."

"Eh?" Thompson looked at him keenly. "Have you been revising your philosophy of life?"

"No. Merely bringing it up to date," Carr replied soberly. "We have what we have in the way of government, economic practice, principles of justice, morality — so forth and so on. I'm opposed to a lot of it. Too much that's obsolete. A lot that's downright bad. But bad as it is in spots, it is not a circumstance to what we should have to endure if the Germans win this war. I believe in my people and my country. I don't believe in the German system of dominating by sheer force and planned terror. The militarists and the market hunters have brought us to this. But we have to destroy the bogey they have raised before we can deal with them. And a man can't escape nationalism. It's bred in us. What the tribe thinks, the individual thinks. This thing is in the air. We are getting unanimous. Whether or not we approve the cause, we are too proud to consider getting whipped in a war that was forced on us. One way and another, no matter what we privately think of our politicians and industrial barons and our institutions generally, it is becoming unthinkable to the Anglo-Saxon that the German shall stalk rough-shod over us. We are beginning — we common people — to hate him and his works. Look at you and me. We were aloof at first. We are

intelligent. We have learned to saddle feeling with logic. We have not been stampeded by military bands and oratory. Yet there is something in the air. I wish I could fight. You are going to fight. Not because you like fighting, but because you see something to fight for. And before long those who cannot see will be very few. Isn't that about right?"

"I think so," Thompson replied.

"There you are," Carr went on. "Myself, I have put philosophic consideration in abeyance for the time. I've got primitive again. Damn the Central Powers! If I had seven sons I'd send them all to the front."

They had another drink.

"Did you go and say good-by to Sophie?" Carr demanded suddenly.

"I saw her, but I don't think I said good-by," Thompson said absently. He was thinking about Carr's surprising outburst. He agreed precisely with what the old man said. But he had not suspected the old radical of such intensity. "I didn't tell her I was going."

"You didn't tell her," Carr persisted. "Why not?"

"For a variety of reasons." He found it hard to assume lightness with those shrewd old eyes searchingly upon him. "You can tell her good-by for me. Well, let's have a last one. It'll be a good many moons before you and I look over a glass at each other again. If I don't come back I'll be in honorable company. And I'll give them hell while I last."

Carr walked with him down to the train.

"When the war broke out," he said to Thompson at

the coach steps, "if you had proposed to go I should privately have considered you a damned idealistic fool. Now I envy you. You will never have to make apologies to yourself for yourself, nor to your fellows. If I strike a blow that a free people may remain free to work out their destiny in their own fashion, I must do it by proxy. I wish you all the luck there is, Wes Thompson. I hope you come back safe to us again."

They shook hands. A voice warned all and sundry that the train was about to leave, and over the voice rose the strident notes of a gong. Thompson climbed the steps, passed within, thrust his head through an open window as the Imperial Limited gathered way. His last glimpse of a familiar face was of Carr standing bareheaded, looking wistfully after the gliding coaches.

The grandfather clock in the hall was striking nine when Sam Carr came home. He hung his hat on the hall-tree and passed with rather unsteady steps into the living room. He moved circumspectly, with the peculiar caution of the man who knows that he is intoxicated and governs his movements accordingly. Carr's legs were very drunk and he was aware of this, but his head was perfectly clear. He managed to negotiate passage to a seat near his daughter.

Sophie was sitting in a big chair, engulfed therein, one might say. A reading lamp stood on the table at her elbow. A book lay in her lap. But she was staring at the wall absently, and beyond a casual glance at her father she neither moved nor spoke, nor gave any sign of being stirred out of this profound abstraction.

Carr sank into his chair with a sigh of relief.

"I am just about pickled, I do believe," he observed to the room at large.

"So I see," Sophie commented impersonally. "Is there anything uncommon about that? I am beginning to think prohibition will be rather a blessing to you, Dad, when it comes."

"Huh!" Carr grunted. "I suppose one drink does lead to another. But I don't need to be legally safeguarded yet, thank you. My bibulosity is occasional. When it becomes chronic I shall take to the woods."

"Sometimes I find myself wishing we had never come out of the woods," Sophie murmured.

"What?" Carr exclaimed. Then: "That's rich. You with a sure income beyond your needs, in your own right, with youth and health and beauty, with all your life before you, wishing to revert to what you used to say was a living burial? That's equivalent to holding that the ostrich philosophy is the true one — what you cannot see does not exist. That ignorance is better than knowledge — that — that — Hang it, my dear, are you going to turn reactionary? But that's a woman. Now why should —"

"Oh, don't begin one of your interminable, hair-splitting elucidations," Sophie protested. "I know it's showing weakness to desire to run away from trouble. I don't know that I have any trouble to run from. I'm not sure I should dodge trouble if I could. I was just voicing a stray thought. We *were* happy at Lone Moose, weren't we, Dad?"

"After a fashion," Carr replied promptly. "As the

animal is happy with a full belly and a comfortable place to sleep. But we both craved a great deal more than that of life."

"And we are not getting more," Sophie retorted. "When you come right down to fundamentals we eat a greater variety of food, wear better clothes, live on a scale that by our former standards is the height of luxury. But not one of my dreams has come true. And you find solace in a wine glass where you used to find it in books. Over in Europe men are destroying each other like mad beasts. At home, while part of the nation plays the game square, there's another part that grafts and corrupts and profiteers and slacks to no end. It's a rotten world."

"By gad, you have got the blue glasses on to-night, and no mistake," Carr mused. "That's unmitigated pessimism, Sophie. What you need is a vacation. Let somebody else run this women's win-the-war show for awhile, and you take a rest. That's nerves."

"I can't. There is too much to do," Sophie said shortly. "I don't want to. If I sat down and folded my hands these days I'd go crazy."

Carr grunted. For a minute neither spoke. Sophie lay back in her chair, eyes half closed, fingers beating a slow rat-a-tat on the chair-arm.

"Have you seen Wes Thompson lately?" Carr inquired at last.

"I saw him this afternoon," Sophie replied.

"Did he tell you he was going overseas?"

"No." Sophie's interest seemed languid, judged by her tone.

"You saw him this afternoon, eh?" Carr drawled. "That's queer."

"What's queer?" Sophie demanded.

"That he would see you and not tell you where he was off to," Carr went on. "I saw him away on the Limited at six-o'clock. He told me to tell you good-by. He's gone to the front."

Sophie sat upright.

"How could he do that?" she said impatiently. "A man can't get into uniform and leave for France on two hours' notice. He called here about four. Don't be absurd."

"I don't see anything absurd except your incredulous way of taking it," Carr defended stoutly. "I tell you he's gone. I saw him take the train. Who said anything about two hours' notice? I should imagine he has been getting ready for some time. You know Wes Thompson well enough to know that he doesn't chatter about what he's going to do. He sold out his business two weeks ago, and has been waiting to be passed in his tests. He has finally been accepted and ordered to report East for training in aviation. He joined the Royal Flying Corps."

Carr did not know that in the circle of war workers where Sophie moved so much the R. F. C. was spoken of as the "Legion of Death." No one knew the percentage of casualties in that gallant service. Such figures were never published. All that these women knew was that their sons and brothers and lovers, clean-limbed children of the well-to-do, joined the Flying Corps, and that their lives, if glorious, were all too brief

once they reached the Western front. Only the supermen, the favored of God, survived a dozen aërial combats. To have a son or a brother flying in France meant mourning soon or late. So they spoke sometimes, in bitter pride, of their birdmen as the "Legion of Death", a gruesome phrase and apt.

Carr knew the heavy casualties of aërial fighting. But he had never seen a proud woman break down before the ominous cablegram, he had never seen a girl sit dry-eyed and ashy-white, staring dumbly at a slip of yellow paper. And Sophie had — many a time. To her, a commission in the Royal Flying Corps had come to mean little short of a death warrant.

She sat now staring blankly at her father.

"He closed up his business and joined the Flying Corps two weeks ago."

She repeated this stupidly, as if she found it almost impossible to comprehend.

"That's what I said," Carr replied testily. "What the devil did you do to him that he didn't tell you, if he was here only two hours before he left? Why, he must have come to say good-by."

"What did I do?" Sophie whispered. "My God, how was I to know what I was doing?"

She sat staring at her father. But she was not seeing him, and Carr knew she did not see him. Some other vision filled those wide-pupiled eyes. Something that she saw or felt sent a shudder through her. Her mouth quivered. And suddenly she gave a little, stifled gasp, and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LAST BRIDGE

Thompson received his preliminary training in a camp not greatly distant from his birthplace and the suburban Toronto home where the spinster aunts still lived. He did not go to see them at first, for two reasons. Primarily, because he had written them a full and frank account of himself when he got out of the ruck and achieved success in San Francisco. Their reply had breathed an open disappointment, almost hostility, at his departure from the chosen path. They made it clear that in their eyes he was a prodigal son for whom there would never be any fatted calf. Secondly, he did not go because there was seldom anything but short leave for a promising aviator.

Thompson speedily proved himself to belong in that category. There resided in him those peculiar, indefinable qualities imperative for mastery of the air. Under able instruction he got on fast, just as he had got on fast in the Henderson shops. And by the time the first fall snows whitened the ground, he was ready for England and the finishing stages of aërial work antecedent to piloting a fighting plane. He had practically won his official wings.

With his orders to report overseas he received ten days' final leave. And a sense of duty spurred him to look up the maiden aunts, to brave their displeasure for the sake of knowing how they fared. There was little other use to make of his time. The Pacific Coast was too far away. The only person he cared to see there had no wish to see him, he was bitterly aware. And nearer at hand circumstances had shot him clear out of the orbit of all those he had known as he grew to manhood. Recalling them, he had no more in common with them now than any forthright man of action has in common with narrow visionaries. It was not their fault, he knew. They were creatures of their environment, just as he had been. But he had outgrown all faith in creeds and forms before a quickening sympathy with man, a clearer understanding of human complexities. And as he recalled them his associates had been slaves to creed and form, worshippers of the letter of Christianity while unconsciously they violated the spirit of Christ. Thompson had no wish to renew those old friendships, not even any curiosity about them. So he passed them by and went to see his aunts, who had fed and clothed him, to whom he felt a vague sort of allegiance if no particular affection.

It seemed to Thompson like reliving a very vivid sort of dream to get off a street car at a certain corner, to walk four blocks south and turn into the yard before a small brick cottage with a leafless birch rising out of the tiny grass plot and the bleached vines of sweet peas draping the fence palings.

The woman who opened the door at his knock stood

before him a living link with that dreamlike past, unchanged except in minor details, a little more spare perhaps and grayer for the years he had been gone, but dressed in the same dull black, with the same spotless apron, the same bit of a white lace cap over her thin hair, the same pince-nez astride a high bony nose.

Aunt Lavina did not know him in his uniform. He made himself known. The old lady gazed at him searchingly. Her lips worked. She threw her arms about his neck, laughing and sobbing in the same breath.

"Surely, it's myself," Thompson patted her shoulder. "I'm off to the front in a few days and I thought I'd better look you up. How's Aunt Hattie?"

Aunt Lavina disengaged herself from his arms, her glasses askew, her faded old eyes wet, yet smiling as Thompson could not recall ever seeing her smile.

"What a spectacle for the neighbors," she said breathlessly. "Me, at my time of life, hugging and kissing a soldier on the front step. Do come in, Wesley. Harriet will be so pleased. My dear boy, you don't know how we have worried about you. How well you look."

She drew him into the parlor. A minute later Aunt Harriet, with less fervor than her sister perhaps, made it clear that she was unequivocally glad to see him, that any past rancor for his departure from grace was dead and buried.

They were beyond the sweeping current of everyday life, living their days in a back eddy, so to speak. But they were aware of events, of the common enemy, of the straining effort of war, and they were proud of their

nephew in the King's uniform. They twittered over him like fond birds. He must stay his leave out with them.

At this pronunciamento of Aunt Lavina's a swift glance passed between the two old women. Thompson caught it, measured the doubt and uneasiness of the mutual look, and was puzzled thereby.

But he did not fathom its source for a day or two, and only then by a process of deduction. They treated him handsomely, they demonstrated an affection which moved him deeply because he had never suspected its existence. (They had always been so precise, almost harsh with him as a youngster.) But their living was intolerably meager. Disguise it with every artifice, a paucity of resource — or plain niggardliness — betrayed itself at every meal. Thompson discarded the theory of niggardliness. And proceeding thence on the first conclusion stood his two aunts in a corner — figuratively, of course — and wrung from them a statement of their financial status.

They were proud and reluctant. But Thompson had not moved among and dealt with men of the world to be baffled by two old women, so presently he was in possession of certain facts.

They had not been able to support themselves, to rear and educate him, on their income alone, and gradually their small capital had been consumed. They were about to negotiate the sale of their home, the proceeds of which would keep them from want — if they did not live too long. They tried to make light of it, but Thompson grasped the tragedy. They had been born

in that brick cottage with the silver birch before the door.

"Well," he said at length, "I don't want to preëmpt the Lord's prerogative of providing. But I can't permit this state of affairs. I wish you had taken me into your confidence, aunties, when I was a youngster. However, that doesn't matter now. Can you live comfortably on eleven hundred dollars a year?"

Aunt Harriet held up her hands.

"My dear boy," she said, "such a sum would give us luxuries, us two old women. But that is out of the question. If we get five thousand for the place we shall have to live on a great deal less than that."

"Forget that nonsense about selling this place," Thompson said roughly. That grated on him. He felt a sense of guilt, of responsibility too long neglected. "Where I'm going I shall be supplied by the government with all I need. I've made some money. I own war-bonds sufficient to give you eleven hundred a year in interest. I'll turn them over to you. If I come back with a whole skin when the war's over, I'll be able to use the capital in a way to provide for all of us. If I don't come back, you'll be secure against want as long as you live."

He made good his word before his leave was up. He had very nearly lost faith in the value of money, of any material thing. He had struggled for money and power for a purpose, to demonstrate that he was a man equal to any man's struggle. He had signally failed in his purpose, for reasons that were still a little obscure to him. Failure had made him a little bitter, bred a pes-

simism it took the plight of his aunts to cure. Even if he had failed to achieve his heart's desire he had acquired power to make two lives content. Save that it ministered to his self-respect to know that he could win in that fierce struggle of the marketplace, money had lost its high value for him. Money was only a means, not an end. But to have it, to be able to bestow it where it was sadly needed, was worth while, after all. If he " crashed " over there, it was something to have banished the grim spectre of want from these two who were old and helpless.

He was thinking of this along with a jumble of other thoughts as he leaned on the rail of a transport slipping with lights doused out of the port of Halifax. There was a lump in his throat because of those two old women who had cried over him and clung to him when he left them. There was another woman on the other side of the continent to whom his going meant nothing, he supposed, save a duty laggardly performed. And he would have sold his soul to feel *her* arms around his neck and her lips on his before he went.

" Oh, well," he muttered to himself as he watched the few harbor lights falling astern, yellow pin-points on the velvety black of the shore, " this is likely to be the finish of *that.* I think I've burned my last bridge. And I have learned to stand on my own feet, whether she believes so or not."

CHAPTER XXVII

THOMPSON'S RETURN

"Anon we return, being gathered again
Across the sad valleys all drabbled with rain."

On an evening near the first of September, 1918, a Canadian Pacific train rumbled into Vancouver over tracks flanked on one side by wharves and on the other by rows of drab warehouses. It rolled, bell clanging imperiously, with decreasing momentum until it came to a shuddering halt beside the depot that rises like a great, brown mausoleum at the foot of a hill on which the city sits looking on the harbor waters below.

Upon the long, shed-roofed platform were gathered the fortunate few whose men were on that train. Behind these waited committees of welcome for stray dogs of war who had no kin. The environs of the depot proper and a great overhead bridge, which led traffic of foot and wheel from the streets to the docks, high over the railway yards, were cluttered with humanity that cheered loudly at the first dribble of khaki from the train below.

It was not a troop train, merely the regular express from the East. But it bore a hundred returned men, and news of their coming had been widely heralded. So the wives and sweethearts, the committees, and the curious, facile-minded crowd, were there to greet these

veterans who were mostly the unfortunates of war, armless, legless men, halt and lame, gassed and shrapnel-scarred — and some who bore no visible sign only the white face and burning eyes of men who had met horror and walked with it and suffered yet from the sight. All the wounds of the war are not solely of the flesh, as many a man can testify.

From one coach there alighted a youngish man in the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps. He carried a black bag. He walked a little stiffly. Beyond that he bore no outward trace of disablement. His step and manner suggested no weakness. One had to look close to discern pallor and a peculiar roving habit of the eyes, a queer tensity of the body. A neurologist, versed in the by-products of war, could have made a fair guess at this man's medical-history sheet. But the folk on the platform that night were not specialists in subtle diagnosis of the nervous system. Nor were the committees. They were male and female of those who had done their bit at home, were doing it now, welcoming their broken heroes. The sight of a man with a scarred face, a mutilated limb, elicited their superficial sympathy, while the hidden sickness of racked nerves in an unmaimed body they simply could not grasp.

So this man with the black bag and the wings on his left arm walked the length of the platform, gained the steel stairway which led to the main floor of the depot, and when he had climbed half-way stopped to rest and to look down over the rail.

Below, the mass of humanity was gravitating into little groups here and there about a khaki center.

There was laughter, and shrill voices, with an occasional hysterical note. There were men surrounded by women and children, and there were others by twos and threes and singly who looked enviously at these little groups of the reunited, men who moved haltingly on their way to the city above, perfunctorily greeted, perfunctorily handshaken, and perfunctorily smiled upon by the official welcomers.

He looked at this awhile, with a speculative, pitying air, and continued his climb, passing at last through great doors into a waiting-room, a place of high, vaulted ceilings, marble pillars, beautiful tiled floors. He evaded welcoming matrons on the watch for unattached officers, to hale them into an anteroom reserved for such, to feed them sandwiches and doubtful coffee, and to elicit tales of their part in the grim business overseas. This man avoided the cordial clutches of the socially elect by the simple expedient of saying that his people expected him. He uttered this polite fiction in self-defense. He did not want to talk or be fed. He was sick of noise, weary of voices, irritated by raucous sounds. All he desired was a quiet place away from the confusion of which he had been a part for many days, to get speedily beyond range of the medley of voices and people that reminded him of nothing so much as a great flock of seagulls swooping and crying over a school of herring.

He passed on to the outer door which gave on the street where taxi drivers and hotel runners bawled their wares, and here in the entrance met the first face he knew. A man about his own age, somewhat shorter, a

great deal thicker through the waist, impeccably dressed, shouldered his way through a group at the exit.

Their eyes met. Into the faces of both leaped instant recognition. The soldier pressed forward eagerly. The other stood his ground. There was a look which approached unbelief on his round, rather florid features. But he grasped the extended hand readily enough.

"By jove, it *is* you, Wes," he said. "I couldn't believe my eyes. So you're back alive, eh? You were reported killed, you know. Shot down behind the German lines. You made quite a record, didn't you? How's everything over there?"

There was a peculiar quality in Tommy Ashe's tone, a something that was neither aloofness nor friendliness, nor anything that Wes Thompson could immediately classify. But it was there, a something Tommy tried to suppress and still failed to suppress. His words were hearty, but his manner was not. And this he confirmed by his actions. Thompson said that things over there were going well, and let it go at that. He was more vitally concerned just then with over here. But before he could fairly ask a question Tommy seized his hand and wrung it in farewell.

"Pardon my rush, old man," he said. "I've got an appointment I can't afford to pass up, and I'm late already. Look me up to-morrow, will you?"

Two years is long for some things, over-brief for others. In Thompson those twenty-four months had softened certain perspectives. He had quickened at

sight of Tommy's familiar face, albeit that face was a trifle grosser, more smugly complacent than he had ever expected to behold it. He could mark the change more surely for the gap in time. But Tommy had not been glad to see him. Thompson felt that under the outward cordiality.

He took up his bag and went out on the street, hailed the least vociferous of the taxi pirates and had himself driven to the Granada Hotel. His brows were still knitting in abstracted thought when a bell-boy had transported the black bag and himself to a room on the sixth floor, received his gratuity and departed. Thompson was high above the rumble of street cars, facing a thoroughfare given largely to motor traffic, with a window which overlooked the lower town and harbor, and the great hills across the Inlet looming duskily massive against the paler sky.

He stood by the window looking over roofs and traffic and the glow-worm light of shipping in the stream. He could smell the sea, the brown kelp bared on rocky beaches by a falling tide. And he fancied that even at that distance he could get a whiff of the fir and cedar that clothed the mountain flank.

"By God," he whispered. "It's good to be back."

He said it much as a man might breathe a prayer. All this that he saw now had lingered in his memory, had risen up to confront him as something beautiful and desirable, many times when he never expected to see it again. For it was not logical, he held, that he should survive where so many others had perished. It was just a whimsey of Fate. And he was duly and

honestly grateful that it had been permitted him to outlive many gallant comrades in the perilous service of the air.

Three days and nights on a train close upon long months in hospital had left him very tired. Rest both his body and uneasy nerves craved insistently. Although it lacked some minutes of eight, he threw off his clothes and went to bed.

In the morning he rose refreshed, eager to be about, to look up men he knew, to talk of things beyond the scope of war.

But when he went out into Vancouver's highways and met people, his uniform gave them a conversational cue. And he found that here, six thousand miles from the guns, even less than among his fellows in the hangars behind the fighting line could he escape that topic. He did not want to talk about fighting and killing. He had lived those things and that was enough. So he came back to the Granada and read the papers and had his lunch and decided to look up Tommy Ashe.

He had learned casually that morning that Tommy's company had more than made good Tommy's prophecy of swift work. Tommy Ashe and Joe Hedley were rising young men.

"Oh, yes, they've got a mint," a broker he knew said to Thompson, with an unconcealed note of envy. "By gad, it's a marvel how a pair of young cubs like that can start on a shoestring and make half a million apiece in two years."

"How did they both manage to escape the draft?" Thompson asked. "I'm sure Ashe is a Class A man."

"Huh!" the broker snorted. "Necessary government undertakings. Necessary hell! All they had to do with the shipbuilding was to bank their rake-off. I tell you, Thompson, this country has supported the war in great style — but there's been a lot of raw stuff in places where you wouldn't suspect it. I'm not knocking, y' understand. This is no time to knock. But when the war's over, we've got to do some house-cleaning."

Thompson called the shipyard first. In the glow of a sunny September morning he felt that he must have imagined Tommy's attitude. He was a fair-minded man, and he gave Tommy the benefit of the doubt.

But he failed to get in touch with Tommy. A voice informed him politely that Mr. Ashe had left town that morning and would be gone several days.

Thompson hung up the receiver. For at least five minutes he sat debating with himself. Then he took it down again.

"Give me Seymour 365L," he said to Central.

"Hello."

"Is Mr. Carr at home?"

"You have the wrong number," he was answered, and he heard the connection break.

He tried again, and once more the same voice, this time impatiently, said, "Wrong number."

"Wait," Thompson said quickly. "Is this Seymour 365L, corner of Larch and First?"

"Yes."

"I beg pardon for bothering you. I'm just back from overseas and I'm rather anxious to locate Mr.

Carr — Samuel A. Carr. This was his home two years ago."

"Just a minute," the feminine voice had recovered its original sweetness. "Perhaps I can help you. Hold the line."

Thompson waited. Presently he was being addressed again.

"My husband believes Mr. Carr still owns this place. We lease through an agent, however, Lyng and Salmon, Credit Foncier Building. Probably they will be able to give you the required information."

"Thanks," Thompson said.

He found Lyng and Salmon's number in the telephone book. But the lady was mistaken. Carr had sold the place. Nor did Lyng and Salmon know his whereabouts.

Tommy would know. But Tommy was out of town. Still there were other sources of information. A man like Carr could not make his home in a place no larger than Vancouver and drop out of sight without a ripple. Thompson stuck doggedly to the telephone, sought out numbers and called them up. In the course of an hour he was in possession of several facts. Sam Carr was up the coast, operating a timber and land undertaking for returned soldiers. The precise location he could not discover, beyond the general one of Toba Inlet.

They still maintained a residence in town, an apartment suite. From the caretaker of that he learned that Sophie spent most of her time with her father, and that their coming and going was uncertain and unheralded.

The latter facts were purely incidental, save one.

Tommy Ashe had that morning cleared the *Alert* for a coastwise voyage.

Sam Carr and Sophie were up the coast. Tommy was up the coast. Thompson sat for a time in deep study. Very well, then. He, too, would journey up the coast. He had not come six thousand miles to loaf in a hotel lobby and wear out shoe leather on concrete walks.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FAIR WINDS

Within a gunshot of the heart of Vancouver lies a snug tidal basin where yachts swing to their moorings, where a mosquito fleet of motor craft lies along narrow slips, with the green woods of Stanley Park for a background. Thompson knew Coal Harbor well. He knew the slips and the boats and many of the men who owned them. He had gone on many a week-end cruise out of that basin with young fellows who looked their last on the sea when they crossed the English Channel. So he had picked up a working fund of nautical practice, a first-hand knowledge of the sea and the manner of handling small sail.

From the Granada he went straight to Coal Harbor. While the afternoon was yet young he had chartered a yawl, a true one-man craft, carrying plenty of canvas for her inches, but not too much. She had a small, snug cabin, was well-found as to gear, and was equipped with a sturdy single-cylinder gas engine to kick her along through calm and tideway.

Before six he had her ready for sea, his dunnage bag aboard, grub in the lockers, gas in the tanks, clearance from the customhouse. He slept aboard in a bunk softer than many a sleeping place that had fallen to

his lot in France. And at sunrise the outgoing tide bore him swiftly through the Narrows and spewed him out on the broad bosom of the Gulf of Georgia, all ruffled by a stiff breeze that heeled the little yawl and sent her scudding like a gray gull when Thompson laid her west, a half north, to clear Roger Curtis Point.

He blew through Welcome Pass at noon on the forefront of a rising gale, with the sun peeping furtively through cracks in a gathering cloudbank. As the wind freshened, the manes of the white horses curled higher and whiter. Thompson tied in his last reef in the lee of a point midway of the Pass. Once clear of it the marching surges lifted the yawl and bore her racing forward, and when the crest passed she would drop into a green hollow like a bird to its nest, to lift and race and sink deep in the trough again.

But she made merry weather of it. And Thompson rode the tiller, an eye to his sheets, glorying in his mastery of the sea. It was good to be there with a clean wind whistling through taut stays, no sound but the ripple of water streaming under his lee, and the swoosh of breaking seas that had no power to harm him. Peace rode with him. His body rested, and the tension left his nerves which for months had been strung like the gut on a violin.

Between Welcome Pass and Cape Coburn the southeaster loosed its full fury on him. The seas rose steeper at the turn of the tide, broke with a wicked curl. He put the Cape on his lee after a wild fifteen minutes among dangerous tiderips, and then prudence drove him to shelter.

He put into a bottle-necked cove gained by a passage scarce twenty feet wide which opened to a quiet lagoon where no wind could come and where the swell was broken into a foamy jumble at the narrow entrance.

He cooked his supper, ate, watched the sun drop behind the encircling rim of firs. Then he lay on a cushion in the cockpit until dark came and the green shore of the little bay grew dim and then black and the dusky water under the yawl's counter was split with the phosphorescent flashes of darting fish.

Across a peninsula, on the weather side of the Cape, he could hear the seas thud and the surf growl like the distant booming of heavy batteries. Over his head the wind whistled and whined in the firs with a whistle and a whine like machine-gun bullets that have missed their mark. But neither of these sounds held the menace of the sounds of which they reminded him. He listened to those diapasons and thin trebles and was strangely soothed. And at last he grew sleepy and turned in to his bunk.

Some time in the night he had a weird sort of dream. He was falling, falling swiftly from a great height in the air. On the tail of his plane rode a German, with a face like those newspaper caricatures of the Kaiser, who shot at him with a trench mortar — boom — boom — boom — boom!

Thompson found himself sitting up in his bunk. The queer dream had given place to reality, in which the staccato explosions continued. As he put his face to an open porthole a narrow, searching ray of uncommon brilliance flashed over his yawl and picked up the shore

beyond. Back of the searchlight lifted the red, green, and white triangle of running lights laid dead for him. It sheered a little. The brilliant ray blinked out. He saw a dim bulk, a pale glimmer through cabin windows, heard the murmur of voices and the rattle of anchor chain running through hawse pipe. Then he closed his eyes and slept again.

He rose with the sun. Beside him lay a sturdily built motor tug. A man leaned on the towing bitts aft, smoking a pipe, gazing at the yawl. Twenty feet would have spanned the distance between them.

Thompson emerged into the cockpit. The air was cool and he was fully dressed. At sight of the uniform with the insignia on sleeve and collar the man straightened up, came to attention, lifted his hand smartly in the military salute — the formality tempered by a friendly grin. Thompson saw then that the man had a steel hook where his left hand should have been. Also a livid scar across his cheek where a bullet or shrapnel had plowed.

"It's a fine morning after a wild night," Thompson broke the conversational ice.

"It was a wild night outside and no mistake," the man replied. "We took cover about midnight — got tired of plowing into it, and wasn't too keen for wallowing through them rips off the Cape. Say, are you back long from over there?"

"Not long," Thompson replied. "I left England two weeks ago."

"How's it going?"

"We're over the hump," Thompson told him.

"They're outgunned now. The Americans are there in force. And we have them beaten in the air at last. You know what that means if you've been across."

"Don't I know it," the man responded feelingly. "By the Lord, it's me that does know it. I was there when the shoe was on the other foot. I was a gunner in the Sixty-eighth Battery, and you can believe me there was times when it made us sick to see German planes overhead. Well, I hope they give Fritz hell. He gave it to us."

"They will," Thompson answered simply, and on that word their talk of the war ended. They spoke of Vancouver, and of the coast generally.

"By the way, do you happen to know whereabouts in Toba Inlet a man named Carr is located?" Thompson bethought him of his quest. "Sam Carr. He is operating some sort of settlement for returned men, I've been told."

"Sam Carr? Sure. The *Squalla* here belongs to him — or to the Company — and Carr is just about the Company himself."

A voice from the interior abaft the wheelhouse bellowed "Grub-pi-l-e."

"That's breakfast," the man said. "I see you ain't lighted your fire yet. Come and have a bite with us. Here, make this line fast and lay alongside."

The wind had died with the dawn, and the sea was abating. The *Squalla* went her way within the hour, and so did Thompson. There was still a small air out of the southeast, sufficient to give him steerageway in the swell that ran for hours after the storm. Between

sail and power he made the Redonda Islands and passed between them far up the narrow gut of Waddington Channel, lying in a nook near the northern end of that deep pass when night came on. And by late afternoon the following day he had traversed the mountain-walled length of Toba Inlet and moored his yawl beside a great boom of new-cut logs at the mouth of Toba River.

Thanks to meeting the *Squalla* he knew his ground. Also he knew something of Sam Carr's undertaking. The main camp was four miles up the stream. The deep fin-keel of the yawl barred him from crossing the shoals at the river mouth except on a twelve-foot tide. So he lay at the boom, planning to go up the river next morning in the canoe he towed astern in lieu of a dinghy.

He sat on his cushions in the cockpit that evening looking up at a calm, star-speckled sky. On either side of him mountain ranges lifted like quiescent saurians, heads resting on the summit of the Coast Range, tails sweeping away in a fifty-mile curve to a lesser elevation and the open waters of the Gulf. The watery floor of Toba Inlet lay hushed between, silvered by a moon-path, shimmering under the same pale rays that struck bluish-white reflections from a glacier high on the northern side. It was ghostly still at the mouth of the valley whence the Toba River stole down to salt water, with somber forests lining the beach and clinging darkly on the steep slopes. A lone light peeped from the window of a cabin on shore. The silence was thick, uncanny. But it was a comforting silence to Thompson. He felt no loneliness, he whom the lonely places

had once appalled. But that was a long time ago. Sitting there thinking of that, he smiled.

No man lives by, for, or because of love alone. Nor does a woman, although the poets and romancers have very nearly led us to believe a woman does. Yet it is a vital factor upon some occasions, in many natures. There had been times in Thompson's life when the passion Sophie Carr kindled in him seemed a conflagration that must either transfigure or destroy him. It was like a volcano that slept, and woke betimes.

The last two years had rather blotted out those periods of eruption. He had given her up, and in giving up all hope of her, Sophie and everything that linked her with him from Lone Moose to the last time he saw her had grown dim, like a book read long ago and put by on the shelf. In the fierce usages of aërial warfare distracted thought, any relaxing from an eagle-like alertness upon the business in hand, meant death swift and certain. And no man, even a man whose heart is sore, wishes to die. The will-to-live is too strong in him. Pride spurs him. To come off victorious over a concrete enemy, to uphold the traditions of his race, to be of service — these things will carry any man over desperate places without faltering, if he feels them.

And Wes Thompson had experienced that sort of vision rather keenly. It had driven him, a man of peaceful tendency, to blood-drenched fields. For two years he had been in another world, in a service that demanded of a man all that was in him. He was just

beginning to be conscious that for so long he had been detached from life that flowed in natural, normal channels.

He was conscious too, of a queer, impersonal manner of thinking about things and people, now that he was back. He wondered about himself. What particular motive, for instance, had driven him up here? To be sure there was the very plausible one of obeying a physician's order about living in the open, of keeping decent hours, of avoiding crowds and excitement until he was quite himself again. But he could have done that without coming to Toba Inlet.

Of course he wanted to see Sam Carr again. Also he wanted to see Sophie. *Why* he wished to see her was not so readily answered. He wanted to see her again, that was all — just as he had wanted to see Canada and his aunts, and the green slopes of the Pacific again. Because all these things and people were links with a past that was good and kindly by comparison with the too-vivid recent days. Yes, surely, he would be glad to see Sam Carr — and Sophie. When he recalled the last time he spoke with her he could smile a little wryly. It had been almost a tragedy then. It did not seem much now. The man who had piloted a battle-plane over swaying armies in France could smile reminiscently at being called a rabbit by an angry girl.

It was queer Sophie had never married. His thought took that turn presently. She was — he checked the years on his fingers — oh, well, she was only twenty-four. Still, she was no frail, bloodless creature, but a woman destined by nature for mating, a beautiful

woman well fit to mother beautiful daughters and strong sons, to fill a lover with joy and a husband with pride.

A queer warmth flushed Thompson's cheek when he thought of Sophie this wise. A jealous feeling stabbed at him. The virus was still in his blood, he became suddenly aware. And then he laughed out loud, at his own camouflaging. He had known it all the time. And this trip it would be kill or cure, he said to himself whimsically.

Still it *was* odd, now he came to think of it, that Sophie had never in those years found a man quite to her liking. She had had choice enough, Thompson knew. But it was no more strange, after all, than for himself never to have looked with tender eyes on any one of the women he had known. He had liked them, but he hadn't ever got past the stage of comparing them with Sophie Carr. She had always been the standard he set to judge the others. Thompson realized that he was quite a hopeless case in this respect.

"I must be a sort of a freak," he muttered to himself when he was stowed away in his blankets. "I wonder if I *could* like another woman as well, if I tried? Well, we'll see, we'll see."

CHAPTER XXIX

TWO MEN AND A WOMAN

Thompson drove his canoe around a jutting point and came upon a white cruiser swinging at anchor in an eddy. Her lines were familiar though he had not seen her in two years. In any case the name *Alert* in gold leaf on her bows would have enlightened him. He was not particularly surprised to find Tommy's motor boat there. He had half-expected to find Tommy Ashe hereabouts.

A man's head rose above the after companion-hatch as the canoe glided abreast.

"Is Mr. Ashe aboard?" Thompson asked.

The man shook his head.

"Went up to Carr's camp a while ago."

"When did you get in?" Thompson inquired further.

"Last night. Lost a day laying up at Blind Bay for a southeaster. Gee, she did blow."

Thompson smiled and passed on. Blind Bay was only two miles from Cape Coburn. Just a narrow neck of land had separated them that blustery night. It was almost like a race. Tommy would not be pleased to see him treading so close on his heels. Thompson felt that intuitively. All was fair in love and war. Still, even in aërial warfare, ruthless and desperate as

it was, there were certain courtesies, a certain element of punctilio. Thompson had an intuition that Ashe would not subscribe to even that simple code. In fact he began to have a premonition of impending conflict as he thrust stoutly on his paddle blade. Tommy had changed. He was no longer the simple, straightforward soul with whom Thompson had fought man-fashion on the bank of Lone Moose, and with whom he had afterward achieved friendship on a long and bitter trail.

Three hundred yards past the *Alert* he came to a landing stage which fitted the description given by the skipper of the *Squalla*. Thompson hauled his canoe out on the float, gained the shore, and found a path bordering the bank. He followed this. Not greatly distant he could hear the blows of chopping, the shrill blasts of a donkey-engine whistle and the whirr of the engine itself as it shuddered and strained on its anchored skids, reeling up half a mile, more or less, of inch and a quarter steel cable, snaking a forty-foot log out of the woods as a child would haul a toothpick on the end of a string.

Before long the brush-floored forest opened on a small area of parked wood. In this pleasant place stood a square block of a house. From a tall staff fluttered the Union Jack. As Thompson came near this the door opened and a group of youngsters tumbled out pell-mell and began to frolic. Thompson looked at his watch. He had stumbled on a school in the hour of morning recess.

"Where does Mr. Carr live?" he asked one of these

urchins when he got near enough to have speech with him.

The youngster pointed up-stream.

"First house you come to," he said. "White house with shingles painted green. Say, mister, have you just come from the war? My dad was over there. Do you know my dad, mister?"

The boy stood gazing at him, apparently hopeful of paternal acquaintance, until he discovered that Thompson did not know his "dad." Then he darted back to join his fellows at their game.

Thompson walked on. The white house with green shingles loomed up near at hand, with a clump of flaming maples beside it. Past that stood other houses in an orderly row facing the river, and back of them were sheds and barns, and beyond the group of buildings spread a wide area of cleared land with charred stumps still dotting many an acre.

He had to enter the place he took to be Sam Carr's by the back yard, so to speak. That is, he came up from the rear, passed alongside the house — and halted abruptly, with his foot on the first of three steps rising to a roomy verandah.

He had not meant to eavesdrop, to listen to words not meant for his hearing. But he had worn the common footgear of yachtsmen, a pair of rubber-soled canvas shoes, and so had come to the verandah end unseen and noiselessly. He was arrested there by the sight of two people and the mention of his own name by one of them.

Sophie was sitting on the rail, looking soberly down

on the glacial gray of Toba River. There was a queer expression on her face, a mixture of protest and resignation. Tommy Ashe stood beside her. He had imprisoned one of her hands between his own and he was speaking rapidly, eagerly, passionately.

Thompson had heard without meaning to hear. And what he heard, just a detached sentence or two, shot him through with a sudden blaze of anger. He stepped up on the floor, took quickly the three strides that separated him from Tommy.

"You are nothing but a common liar," he challenged bluntly. "You know you are, when you speak of me as being dead. Is that why you scuttled out of Vancouver and hurried on here, as soon as you saw me back?"

Ashe shrank back a step. His naturally florid face grew purple. Thompson matched him glance for glance, wondering as the moments ticked off why Tommy glared and did not strike.

"Your heart has grown as flabby as your principles," he said at last contemptuously.

For the instant, in anger at a lie, in that fighting mood which puts other considerations into abeyance when it grips a man, Thompson gave no heed to Sophie — until he felt her hand on his arm and looked down into her upturned face, white and troubled, into gray eyes that glowed with some peculiar fire.

"It is really, truly you?" she said in a choked voice.

"Of course," he answered — and he could not help a little fling. "You see I am no longer a rabbit. I don't like your friend here. He has tried to sneak a

march on me, and I suspect it is not the first. I feel like hurting him."

She paid not the least heed to that.

"You were officially reported dead," she went on. "Reported shot down behind the German lines a year ago."

"I know I was reported dead, and so have many other men who still live," he said gently. "I was shot down, but I escaped and flew again, and was shot down a second time and still am here not so much the worse."

Sophie slipped her hand into his and turned on Tommy Ashe.

"And you knew this?" she said slowly. "Yet you came here to me this morning — and — and —"

She stopped with a break in her voice.

"I didn't believe you were capable of a thing like that, Tommy," she continued sadly. "I'm ashamed of you. You'd better go away at once."

Ashe looked at her and then at Thompson, and his face fell. Thompson, watching him as a man watches his antagonist, saw Tommy's lips tremble, a suspicious blur creep into his eyes. Even in his anger he felt sorry for Tommy.

The next instant the two of them stood alone, Sophie's hand caught fast in his. She tried to withdraw it. The red leaped into her cheeks. But there was still that queer glow in her eyes.

Thompson looked down at the imprisoned hand.

"You'll never get that away from me again," he said whimsically. "You see, I am not a rabbit, but a man, no matter what you thought once. And when a

man really wants a thing, he takes it if he can. And I want you — so — you see? "

For answer Sophie hid her hot face against his breast.

"Ah, I'm ashamed of myself too," he heard a muffled whisper. "I sent you away into that hell over there with a sneer instead of a blessing. And I was too ashamed, and a little afraid, to write and tell you what a fool I was, that I'd made a mistake and was sorry. I couldn't do anything only wait, and hope you'd come back. Didn't you hate me for my miserable holier-than-thou preachment that day, Wes? "

"Why, no," he said honestly. "It hurt like the devil, of course. You see it was partly true. I *was* going along, making money, playing my own little hand for all it was worth. I couldn't rush off to the front just to demonstrate to all and sundry — even to you — that I was a brave man and a patriot. You understand, don't you? It took me quite a while to feel, to really and truly feel, that I *ought* to go — which I suppose you felt right at the beginning. When I did see it that way — well, I didn't advertise. I just got ready and went. If you had not been out of sorts that day, I might have gone away with a kiss instead of your contempt. But I didn't blame you. Besides, that's neither here nor there, now. You're a prisoner. You can only be paroled on condition."

Sophie smiled up at him, and was kissed for her pains.

"Name the condition."

"That you love me. I've waited a long time for it."

"I've always loved you," she said gravely. "Some-

times more, sometimes less. I haven't always believed we could be happy together. Sometimes I have been positive we couldn't. But I've always measured other men by you, and none of them quite measured up. That was why it stung me so to see you so indifferent about the war. Probably if you had talked about it to me, if I had known you were thinking of going, I should have been afraid you would go, I should have been afraid for you. But you seemed always so unconcerned. It maddened me to think I cared so much for a man who cared nothing about wrongs and injustices, who could sit contentedly at home while other men sacrificed themselves. My dear, I'm afraid I'm an erratic person, a woman whose heart and head are nearly always at odds."

Thompson laughed, looking down at her with an air of pride.

"That is to say you would always rather be sure than sorry," he remarked. "Well, you can be sure of one thing, Sophie. You can't admit that you really do care for me and then run away, as you did at Lone Moose. I have managed to stand on my own feet at last, and your penalty for liking me and managing to conceal the fact these many moons is that you must stand with me."

She drew his face down to her and kissed it. Thompson held her fast.

"I can stand a lot of that," he said happily.

"You may have to," she murmured. "I am a woman, not a bisque doll. And I've waited a long time for the right man."

CHAPTER XXX

A MARK TO SHOOT AT

An hour or so later Sam Carr came trudging home with a rod in his hand and a creel slung from his shoulder, in which creel reposed a half dozen silver-sided trout on a bed of grass.

"Well, well, well," he said, at sight of Thompson, and looked earnestly at the two of them, until at last a slow smile began to play about his thin lips. "Now, like the ancient Roman, I can wrap my toga about me and die in peace."

"Oh, Dad, what a thing to say," Sophie protested.

"Figuratively, my dear, figuratively," he assured her. "Merely my way of saying that I am glad your man has come home from the war, and that you can smile again."

He tweaked her ear playfully, when Sophie blushed. They went into the house, and the trout disappeared kitchenward in charge of a bland Chinaman, to reappear later on the luncheon table in a state of delicious brown crispness. After that Carr smoked a cigar and Thompson a cigarette, and Sophie sat between them with the old, quizzical twinkle in her eyes and a smile hovering about the corners of her mouth.

"Come out and let's make the round of the works, you two," Carr suggested at last.

"You go, Wes," Sophie said. "I have promised to help a struggling young housewife with some sewing this afternoon."

So they set forth, Carr and Thompson, on a path through the woods toward where the donkey engines filled the valley with their shrill tootings and the shudder of their mighty labor. And as they went, Carr talked.

"All this was virgin forest when you went away," said he. "The first axe was laid to the timber a year ago last spring. I want you to take particular notice of this timber. Isn't it magnificent stuff? We are sending out a little aëroplane spruce, too. Not a great deal, but every little helps."

It was a splendid forest that they traversed, a level area clothed with cedar and spruce and fir, lifting brown trunks of six and seven-foot girth to a great height. And in a few minutes they came upon a falling gang at work. Two men on their springboards, six feet above the ground, plying an eight-foot saw. They stood to watch. Presently the saw ate through to the undercut, a deep notch on the leaning side, and the top swayed, moved slowly earthward. The sawyers leaped from their narrow footing. One cried "Tim-b-r-r-r." And the tree swept in a great arc, smiting the earth with a crash of breaking boughs and the thud of an arrested landslide.

Beyond that there was a logged space, littered with broken branches, stumps, tops, cut with troughs plowed

deep in the soil, where the donkey had skidded out the logs. And there was the engine puffing and straining, and the steel cables running away among the trees, spooling up on the drums, whining and whistling in the iron sheaves. It was like war, Thompson thought, that purposeful activity, the tremendous forces harnessed and obedient to man — only these were forces yoked to man's needs, not to his destruction.

They lingered awhile watching the crew work, chatted with them in spare moments. Then Carr led Thompson away through the woods again, and presently took him across another stretch of stumps where men were drilling and blasting out the roots of the ravished trees, on to fields where grain and grass and root crops were ripening in the September sun, and at last by another cluster of houses to the bank of the river again. Here Carr sat down on a log, and began to fill a pipe.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of it?"

"For eighteen months' work you have made an astonishing amount of headway," Thompson observed. "This is hard land to clear."

"Yes," Carr admitted. "But it's rich land — all alluvial, this whole valley. Anything that can be grown in this latitude will grow like a village scandal here."

He lighted his pipe.

"I tried high living and it didn't agree with me," Carr said abruptly. "I have tried a variety of things since I left the North, and none of them has seemed worth while. I'm not a philanthropist. I hate char-

itable projects. They're so damned unscientific — don't you think so?"

Thompson nodded.

"You know that about the time you left, discharged soldiers were beginning to drift back," Carr continued. "Drift is about the word. The cripples of war will be taken care of. Their case is obvious, too obvious to be overlooked or evaded. But there are returned men who are not cripples, and still are unfit for military duty. They came back to civilian existence, and a lot of them didn't fit in. The jobs they could get were not the jobs they could do. As more and more of them came home the problem grew more and more acute. It is still acute, and I rather think it will grow more acute until the crisis comes with the end of the war and God knows how many thousands of men will be chucked into civil life, which cannot possibly absorb them again as things are going at present. It's a problem. Public-spirited men have taken it up. The government took the problem of the returned soldier into consideration. So far as I know they are still considering it. The Provincial Legislature talked — and has done nothing. The Dominion Government has talked a lot, but nothing more than temporary measures has come out of it. Nothing practical. You can't feed men with promises of after-the-war reconstruction.

"All this was apparent to me. So I talked it over with Sophie and one or two other men who wanted to do something, and we talked to returned soldiers. We couldn't do what it's the business of the country to

do — and may perhaps do when the red tape is finally untangled. But we could do something, with a little brains and money and initiative. So we went at it.

"I formed a joint stock company. We secured all the timber limits in this valley. We got together a little group for a start. They were returned men, some physically handicapped, but eager to do something for themselves. A man with that spirit always makes good if he gets a chance. We put in machinery and gear, put up a small sawmill for ourselves, tore into the logging business, cleared land, built houses. You see we are quite a community. And we are a self-supporting community. Some of these men own stock in the company. Any returned man can find a place for himself here. There is room and work and security and ultimate independence here for any man willing to cooperate for the common welfare. This valley runs for miles. As fast as the land is logged off it is open for soldier entry. There is room here for five hundred families. So you see there is a lot of scope.

"It was in the nature of an experiment. There were peóple who sneered. And it is working out well. There is not the slightest taint of charity in it. If I used a lot of money that may be a long time coming back to me that is my own business. Everybody here pays his own way. All these men needed was backing and direction."

Carr looked away across the clearing. His glance swept the houses, and fields, and the distant woods where the logging crews labored.

"And there are valleys and valleys," he said thought-

fully; "when they are cleared and cultivated there is endless room in them for people who want elbow-room, who want to live without riding on the other fellow's back.

"Better get in with us, Wes," he said abruptly. "I'm getting old. It won't be long before I have to quit. This thing will need a pilot for a long time yet. Men will always have to have a leader. You can do good here. Big oaks, you know, from little acorns. I mean, if this project continues to achieve success, it might blaze the way for a national undertaking. We said that a country that was worth living in was worth fighting for. We are liars and cheats if we do not make it so for those who did our fighting."

"I wouldn't mind taking a hand in this game," Thompson said. "But the war is still on. If that were over — well, yes, Toba Valley looks good to me."

"You aren't out of it for good, then?"

Thompson shook his head.

Carr put his hand on Thompson's shoulder. "Ah, well," he said. "It won't be long now. You'll be back. You can put on an aërial mail service for us, as your first undertaking."

He chuckled, and they left their log and strolled back toward the house.

"Come and I'll show you what the valley looks like, Wes," Sophie said to him, when they had finished dinner, and Carr had his nose buried in mail just that evening arrived.

She led him a hundred yards up-stream to where a

footbridge slung upon steel cables spanned the Toba, crossed that and a little flat on the north side, and climbed up the flank of a slide-scarred hill until she came out on a little plateau.

"Look," she waved her hand, panting a little from the steepness of the climb.

Five hundred feet below, the valley of the Toba spread its timbered greenness, through which looped in sweeping curves the steel-gray of the river. In a great bend immediately beneath them lay the houses of the settlement, facing upon the stream. Farther along were isolated homesteads which he had not seen. Back of these spread little gardens, and the green square of cultivated fields, and beyond in greater expanse the stump-dotted land that was still in the making.

The smoke of the donkey-engines was vanished, fires grown cold with the end of the day's work. But up-river and down the spoil of axe and saw lay in red booms along the bank. He could mark the place where he had stood that afternoon and watched a puffing yarder bunt a string of forty-foot logs into the booming-ground. He could see figures about in the gardens, and the shrill voices and laughter of children echoed up to them on the hill.

"It is a great view, and there is more in it than meets the eye," Thompson said. "Eh, little woman? The greatest war of all, the biggest struggle. One that never ends. Man struggling to subdue his environment to his needs."

Sophie smiled understandingly. She looked over the valley with a wistful air.

"Did you ever read 'The Sons of Martha'?" she asked. Do you remember these lines:

"'Not as a ladder to reach high Heaven,
Not as an altar to any creed,
But simple service simply given
To his own kind in their common need.'"

"It is a noble mark to shoot at," Thompson said.

He fell silent. Sophie went on after a minute.

"Dad said he was going back to first principles when he began this. There are men here who have found economic salvation and self-respect, who think he is greater than any general. I'm proud of dad. He wanted to do something. What he has accomplished makes all my puttering about at what, after all, was pure charity, a puerile sort of service. I gave that up after you went away." She snuggled one hand into his. "It didn't seem worth while — nothing seemed worth while until dad evolved this."

She waved her hand again over the valley. Thompson's eyes gleamed. It was good to look at, good to think of. It was good to be there. He remembered, with uncanny, disturbing clearness of vision, things he had looked down upon from a greater height over bloody stretches in France. And he shuddered a little.

Sophie felt the small tremor run through him.

"What is it?" she whispered anxiously.

"It is beautiful, and I can appreciate its beauty all the more from seeing it with you. I'd like to take a hand in this," he said quietly. "I was just comparing it with other things — and wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"If I'll get back to this — and you," he said, with his arms around her. "Oh, well, I've got three months' leave. That's a lot."

Sophie looked at him out of troubled eyes. Her voice shook.

"You will be ordered to the front again?"

He nodded. "Very likely."

"I don't want you to go," she broke out passionately. "You mustn't. Oh, Wes, Wes!"

"Do you think I like the prospect any better?" he said tenderly. "But I am an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, and the war is not over yet. Buck up, sweetheart. I had six months' training, a year in fighting planes, six months in hospital, and barring an occasional spell of uncertain nerves, I am still as good as ever. Don't worry. I was silly to say what I thought, I suppose."

"Nevertheless, it is true," she said. "You may go again and never come back. But I suppose one must face that. Thousands of women have had to face it. Why should I be exempt?"

She wiped her eyes and smiled uncertainly.

"We shall simply have to keep that in the background. I want to forget everything but that you are here and that I'm happy," she whispered, with her arms about his neck. "I want to forget everything else — until it's time for you to go."

"Amen," Thompson replied, and kissed her, and then they went silently, hand in hand down to the swinging bridge with the sun gone to rest below the

western sky-line, and dusk creeping softly up over the valley floor.

There will be those who, having followed so far, will desire further light. They will ask naïvely: Did Wes Thompson go back to the front and get killed? Did they marry and find lasting happiness?

To these curious folk who seek explicit detail, I can only point out that Wes Thompson had three months' leave which ran into November, and that to Sophie that ninety days loomed like a stay of execution. I would ask them further to recall the eleventh of November, 1918 — and so the first question is duly answered.

As for the second — I am no soothsayer. I cannot foretell the future. Most certainly they married. At once — with a haste prudery and lovers of formalism might term indecent.

Whether they live happily who can say? Somewhere between the day he first looked on Sophie Carr at Lone Moose and the day he fell five thousand feet to earth in a flaming battle-plane, keeping his life by one of war's miracles, Wes Thompson lived and loved and suffered perhaps a little more than falls to the common lot. He sloughed off prejudices and cant and ignorance and narrowness in those six years as a tree sheds its foliage in autumn.

A man may come to doubt the omnipotence of God without denying his Maker. He may scorn churchly creeds and cleave to the Golden Rule. He may hate greed and oppression, and injustice and intolerance,

and ruthless exploitation of man by man — and still hold firm faith in humanity, still yearn to love his neighbor as himself.

To do good, to fight hard and play fair, to love faithfully and to desire love, to go out of the world when his time should come with the knowledge of having at least tried to make it a little better for those who were in it, and for those who should come after. That was Wes Thompson's working philosophy of life — if he might be said to have a philosophy — although he certainly never formulated it in words.

He married a woman whom he loved dearly, who loved him, was proud of him, who saw life as he did — through tolerant, comprehending eyes. So if you ask whether they found real and lasting happiness I can only cite you bald facts. I cannot prophesy. But I wish my chances were as good.

THE END

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